

**‘Practical Sympathy’: Disaster Response in the British Caribbean
1812-1907**

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The candidate confirms that the work submitted is his own and that appropriate credit has been given where reference has been made to the work of others.

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Abstract

Informed by environmental history, this thesis sets out to examine what shaped British colonial responses to disaster in the nineteenth and twentieth century Caribbean. To answer that question, the thesis uses colonial documents and contemporary travel writing to first examine the environmental change that British colonialism wrought on the region. Those in control of the colonies were primarily driven by their desire to extract profit from them and the sugar plantation emerged as the primary vehicle by which to do it. Plantation monoculture was intensively expanded through deforestation and exhaustive use of soils. Those in control of the region could not conceive of any other way to derive profit from the region, thus locking in this system and precluding more sustainable enterprise. What is more, these enduring alterations forced upon the islands made their inhabitants more vulnerable to the region's hazards. This thesis argues that this unchecked desire to extract wealth was one of the primary shapers of relief. First-hand accounts and colonial office records show that, in the short term, colonial responses were ad-hoc, and fraught with anxiety due to the need to respond to shortages of food and materials. These shortages ultimately stemmed from the deleterious effects of intensive plantation agriculture. Furthermore, a deep racist fear of African-Caribbean insurrection meant that in these moments of flux the desire to ensure white control was another central shaper of colonial responses. This thesis concludes that in the long term, as the plantation remained the foundation of the economy, Parliament primarily offered relief, not to address human suffering, but as a form of 'practical sympathy' to ensure that plantations were rebuilt and control over the labouring population was retained.

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List of abbreviations

JARD Jamaica Archives and Records Department

NLJ National Library of Jamaica

SOAS School of Oriental and African Studies

TNA The National Archives, London

WIC West India Committee

WIR West India Regiment

Introduction

History and disaster

Disasters have long been considered to be simply *natural*. Particularly in the regions where they have occurred with greatest regularity, they have been seen as an inescapable part of everyday life. In the first half of the twentieth century, this perception of disasters as entirely the products of natural phenomena led them to be primarily examined by geographers and natural scientists. However, the disciplinary segregation of disaster has waned from the 1960s onwards as scholars have become increasingly cognisant of the elements humans contribute to the making of disasters.¹ The subsequent emergence of disciplines such as Disaster Risk Reduction has placed further scrutiny on the very idea that disasters are entirely natural. Consequently, sociologists and others from the field of international development have left the idea of *natural* disasters by the wayside and have instead sought to reconstitute disaster as the product of interactions between natural hazards and human conditions.² In this reconstitution, it is the organisation of a given human society that has come to be seen as a key determinant of disaster. One result of this new conception of disaster has been to show that often occurrences of disaster ‘deeply reflect failed or skewed development’.³

This transition in the perception of disaster has on occasion penetrated mainstream discourse; for so many the disproportionate impact of Hurricane Katrina on African-Americans was clearly the product of historically skewed development. The U.S. government’s deeply flawed and racist response to Hurricane Katrina also exposed the extent to which disaster relief, so long considered an ‘apolitical refuge’, was in fact reflective of

¹ Ben Wisner, JC Gaillard, Ilan Kelman, ‘Introduction to Part I’ in *The Routledge Handbook of Hazards and Disaster Risk Reduction*, ed. by Ben Wisner, JC Gaillard, Ilan Kelman (Abingdon: Routledge, 2011), p. 11.

² John Hannigan, *Disasters Without Borders: The International Politics of Natural Disasters* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2012).

³ Wisner, Gaillard, Kelman, ‘Introduction to Part I’, p. 11.

societal power relations.⁴ That said, outside of large-scale events such as Katrina, mainstream discourse has largely paid only lip service to the notion that the varied constructions of human society play a role in creating disaster.

In the traditionally anthropocentric discipline of history, reflecting trends in the earliest works of environmental history (broadly defined) such as Braudel's *History of the Mediterranean*, disasters have tended to feature as a static backdrop to other events.⁵ This has meant that historical writing has for the most part firmly adhered to the idea that disasters are natural, and that they are simply points of interest from which to write narratives primarily concerned with humans. Ernest Zebrowski's book *The last days of St Pierre: the volcanic disaster that claimed thirty thousand lives* and multiple works by Wayne Neely are just two examples of this style relating specifically to the Caribbean.⁶ In direct contrast, the branch of historical writing on disaster that this thesis fits into is that which critically engages with nature-induced disasters and the historical processes which cause them. As a piece of historical writing, this thesis makes a twofold contribution: it shows how studying disaster leads to a better understanding of history whilst also furthering our understanding of what creates disaster. An examination of British colonialism's impact on the Caribbean shows us that the organisation of that society around wealth extraction through the plantation played a significant role in increasing hazard vulnerability. Then through an examination of British responses we can see that the extractive principles guiding colonialism meant that relief was rarely offered to provide universal succour. Instead, as Joseph Chamberlain put it, relief mostly was an expression of 'practical sympathy', money provided to allow the reassertion of

⁴ Hannigan, *Disasters Without Borders*, p. 98.

⁵ J. R. McNeill, 'Observations on the Nature and Culture of Environmental History', *History and Theory*, 42.4 (2003), p. 14.

⁶ Ernest Zebrowski, *The Last Days of St Pierre: The Volcanic Disaster That Claimed 30,000 Lives* (New Brunswick, N.J: Rutgers University Press, 2002); Wayne Neely, *The Great Bahamas Hurricane of 1866: The Story of One of the Greatest and Deadliest Hurricanes to Ever Impact the Bahamas* (Bloomington: iUniverse, 2011).

white dominance and to ensure the rebuilding of the plantations to continue the extraction of profit.⁷

The critical approach to disaster and history

In the discipline of history, the critical approach to disaster has been deeply influenced by concepts drawn from Disaster Risk Reduction studies, and specifically the concepts of vulnerability and resilience. Greg Bankoff in particular has been a path breaker both in the integration of these concepts into the writing of history and in arguing for the contribution that the historian can make to our understanding of disaster.⁸ Specifically, he posits that historians are well placed to uncover the historical ‘roots’ of vulnerability.⁹ This, however, means moving beyond using the word in its most basic sense as a ‘state of being not a condition derivative of historical processes’.¹⁰ Vulnerability as a technical concept lacks a singular definition but given its importance to this thesis’ second chapter in particular, two definitions are drawn upon to give greatest clarity. The first is from Piers Blaikie *et al*’s foundational work *At Risk*:

The characteristics of a person or group and their situation that influence their capacity to anticipate, cope with, resist and *recover from the impact of a natural hazard*.¹¹

The second comes from the United Nation’s strategy for disaster reduction which reads:

⁷ *Parliamentary Papers* (1902), House of Commons [Cd.1201], St Vincent. Correspondence relating to the Volcanic Eruptions in St Vincent and Martinique in May, 1902, Joseph Chamberlain to Lord Mayor of London, May 14, 1902.

⁸ Greg Bankoff, ‘Time is of the Essence: Disasters, Vulnerability and History’, *International Journal of Mass Emergencies and Disasters*, 22:3 (2004), pp. 23-42.

⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹ Piers Blaikie, *At Risk: Natural Hazards, People’s Vulnerability and Disasters* (London ; New York: Routledge, 2003), p. 11. (Author’s emphasis)

Vulnerability is defined as the potential for loss (human, physical, economic, natural, or social) due to a hazardous event. It is the characteristics and circumstances of a community, system or asset that make it susceptible to the damaging effects of a hazard.¹²

Both definitions have their usefulness in allowing us to build a picture of the implications of British colonialism in the region. The definition of vulnerability from *At Risk* is useful in that it includes the potential for recovery. As this thesis will show, plantation agriculture had serious implications for the scope and length of disaster recovery, particularly for the African-Caribbean population. The organisation of labour (first in the form of slavery and later the apprenticeship system followed by a system of free peasantry) deemed necessary to support that enterprise engendered racial inequalities so severe they cannot be overstated. Such stark bifurcation also had significant implications for societal cooperation and thus recovery. Second, the UN definition is useful because it foregrounds the potential for loss as a determinate of vulnerability. Epiphenomenal hazards such as landslides triggered by hurricanes and the marginalisation of subsistence crops regularly increased the potential for human, economic and natural losses.

In its third chapter, this thesis draws on the concept of resilience. Resilience as a technical concept is in many ways the inverse of vulnerability. Where vulnerability considers the potential for loss and time for recovery, resilience considers not only how well a society can withstand the shock from a hazard but also how it adapts and changes in response to repeated shocks.¹³ In the context of this thesis, considering the resilience of British Caribbean society is again crucial to understanding how those in control of the colonies related and

¹² United Nations International Strategy for Disaster Reduction, *UNISDR terminology on disaster risk reduction* (Geneva, 2009).

¹³ United Nations International Strategy for Disaster Reduction, *Hyogo Framework for Action 2005-2015: Building the Resilience of Nations and Communities to Disasters* (Kobe: 2005).

adapted to the environment and ultimately how they chose to respond to disaster. Susannah Hoffman and Anthony Oliver-Smith refer to this relation of human to the environment as ‘mutuality’ and argue that where mutuality is poor, disasters are more likely to occur.¹⁴ Resilience can cover a plethora of adaptations but they can take time, capital and importantly the will to implement them. The third chapter questions how particularly the profit-driven logic underpinning British Caribbean colonialism informed the development or potential underdevelopment of resilience strategies.

An examination of this legacy of British colonialism represents a vital expansion of a limited field of knowledge. The aspects of vulnerability and resilience Britain created in the Caribbean and the history of how it chose to respond to disaster provides us with new insights not only into the Empire but also how disasters were created by the organisation of that society. The Caribbean is a region that still faces no shortage of threats from a plethora of hazards that are atmospheric, climactic and tectonic: understanding at least one facet of the historic processes that made the region vulnerable in the past can only be worthwhile.

Overview of the thesis

Through the concepts of vulnerability and resilience, the first half of this thesis considers how, in relation to the region’s hazards, British Caribbean society was organised and constructed. This foundation is crucial to the second, larger half of this thesis which examines British responses to hazards because, as Bankoff puts it, ‘a country’s response to natural hazards may depend more on its social and organisational practices than its wealth or

¹⁴ Susanna Hoffman, Anthony Oliver Smith, ‘Anthropology and the Angry Earth: An Overview’, in *The Angry Earth: Disaster in Anthropological Perspective*, ed. by Anthony Oliver-Smith and Susanna Hoffman (New York: Routledge, 1999), p. 6.

resources'.¹⁵ Oliver-Smith offers further grounding for this rationale when he says 'disasters are more seen to be characteristic of societies than they are simple physical environments'.¹⁶ In effect, understanding British Caribbean society and its relation with the environment of the region is crucial to understanding its responses to hazards.

In its second chapter this thesis examines the rural and built environments of the British Caribbean. It shows that through the predominance of plantation agriculture, which was established with widespread deforestation, the colonies of the region were made more vulnerable to the region's hazards, such as hurricanes. As deforestation exposed the soil to heavy wind and rains, landslips became a regular additional hazard for inhabitants to avoid. Furthermore, the dominance of sugar cane monoculture regularly left these islands reliant on imports of food and timber to avoid starvation and mass exposure.

The third chapter questions why (if the risk posed by the region's hazards was so great, especially in the context of the vulnerabilities examined in the second chapter) did so little change in the organisation of the British Caribbean? This chapter concludes that unlike in other British colonies, those in control of the Caribbean - the planters and colonial officials - never saw the region as a true home but rather a land from which to derive profit. Though coerced labour ended with the end of the apprenticeship system in 1838, colonial interests still sought to direct all labour to the sugar plantation. It was the only means by which it was imagined profit could be derived from the region and it also functioned as an effective means of social control when freedom could have potentially directed the energies of the African-Caribbean population elsewhere. Consequently, in a society that remained racially bifurcated for the entire nineteenth century there was little incentive for white elites to finance and

¹⁵ Greg Bankoff, 'Historical concepts of disaster and risk', in *The Routledge Handbook of Hazards and Disaster Risk Reduction*, ed. by Ben Wisner, JC Gaillard, Ilan Kelman (Abingdon: Routledge, 2011), p. 36.

¹⁶ *Ibid*, p. 41.

develop methods of hazard resilience beyond simply ensuring the survival of the plantation. British control ensured the Caribbean remained comparatively underdeveloped and that its society was skewed towards the continued extraction of profit thus as Wisner *et al* suggest exacerbating the impacts of hazards in the region.¹⁷

The fourth chapter of this thesis examines immediate responses to hazards, specifically in the days and weeks that followed them. Linking to the second chapter, it shows that, the vulnerabilities such as food shortages engendered by the plantation often worsened, sometimes fatally, the already fraught relationship between the African-Caribbean population and white elites (planters and colonial officials). Across the nineteenth century, the destruction of plantations whether by hurricane, earthquake or volcanic eruption also marked the destruction of the main form of white elite social control. Consequently, immediate responses often tried to replicate that control: provisions were retained by white elites and frequently only distributed when the African-Caribbean population agreed to return to work.

The fifth chapter examines longer term responses to these disasters. It shows that obtaining substantial economic relief was difficult. For most of the nineteenth century, disaster relief was solely obtained through a lengthy and uncertain process of submitting petitions to Parliament. These petitions were not always accepted and even when they were, the monies offered always fell short of estimated losses. These petitions were exclusively made by the white elites of the region and, reflecting the wider logic of exploitation and wealth extraction at the heart of the project of Empire, the suffering of the wider population was always subordinate to economic concerns. If financial relief was given to a colony it usually arrived years after the initial distress, was seldom subject to any oversight and rarely

¹⁷ Wisner, Gaillard, Kelman, 'Introduction to Part I', p. 11.

reached those in most need. Instead, financial relief, reflecting the lack of attachment the white elite felt to the region as established in the third chapter, was directed to simply shoring up the plantation system and restarting the extraction of wealth from the region.

Sources and methodology

This thesis is based primarily on colonial records from The National Archives in London and parliamentary papers accessed through the Hansard database. Second to these, nineteenth century travelogues have formed another large section of this thesis' source base. These two source types have been augmented by newspapers and, where possible, the first-hand accounts of those who witnessed the disasters examined in this thesis. Ivan Ray Tannehall's *Hurricanes Their Nature and History* contains chronological lists of all of the hurricanes which occurred in the Caribbean from 1494 to 1937.¹⁸ This was useful to first establish the disasters that were to be considered in this thesis and thus narrow down how the above source types would be searched through. Tannehall's work was a guide to which islands in the British Caribbean were struck by hurricanes in this period, but not their strength. In particular, the hurricanes that are examined in this thesis are the ones that created the most damage and necessitated the greatest amount of relief and therefore generated the greatest amount of source material. As a result of this criteria, this thesis examines the hurricane of 1831 which primarily affected Barbados and St Vincent, the Dominican Hurricane of 1847, the Tobagan hurricane of 1847, and the hurricane of 1898 which primarily affected Barbados and St Vincent. There are mentions made to other storms, but by virtue of being smaller, they left less of a trace in the archives and thus offer limited insights into the British responses to disaster.

¹⁸ Ivan Ray Tannehall, *Hurricanes Their Nature and History: Particularly those of the West Indies and the Southern Coasts of the United States* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1938), pp. 573-654.

In addition to hurricanes, this thesis also draws on records relating to the 1812 and 1902 eruptions of *La Soufrière* on St Vincent as well as the earthquakes that affected Antigua in 1843 and Jamaica in 1907. Thus in contrast to Matthew Mulcahy's *Hurricanes and Society* and Stuart Schwartz's *Sea of Storms*, this thesis examines not only hurricane impacts, but those of volcanic eruptions and earthquakes. As a central part of this investigation was focused on British disaster relief, it was felt that there was not such a need to focus on a singular hazard type. Relief was provided in some form following all of these different hazards and to consider some relief efforts but not others would be an artificial separation. Christopher Church has successfully taken a similar multi-hazard approach to the study of relief, albeit in the French Caribbean, in his book *Paradise Destroyed*.¹⁹ Unlike hurricanes which had wide variances in the scale of damage they triggered, the volcanic eruptions of 1812 and 1902 and the earthquakes of 1843 and 1907 were the only hazards of this type to affect British colonies in this period and cause significant damage. Consequently, they left rich archival traces that only further aided in understanding British relief practices.

The approach taken in using these sources was informed by Ann Stoler who, in her book *Along the Grain*, argues that with the emergence of subaltern history and history from below there has been a correlating trend of reading colonial sources in a 'self-assured' way, against the grain. This has meant that some historians have analysed colonial records from an antagonistic position, from the outset seeking to uncover what is not written.²⁰ Stoler advances a modification of this approach, positing that colonial records can more productively be read 'along the grain'.²¹ This idea directly informed the way in which

¹⁹ Christopher M. Church, *Paradise Destroyed: Catastrophe and Citizenship in the French Caribbean* (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 2017).

²⁰ Ann Laura Stoler, *Along the Archival Grain: Epistemic Anxieties and Colonial Common Sense* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2010), p. 41.

²¹ *Ibid.* p. 41.

colonial sources were used for this thesis. Colonial sources are the only large body of source material that allows us to learn about disaster in the nineteenth-century British Caribbean.

For most of the nineteenth century, the African-Caribbean population were forcibly discouraged from engaging in anything but religious education and thus sources written by them are scarce. Furthermore, as this thesis will show, the trauma occasioned by disaster inspired different responses in the two majority populations. In contrast to white elites who had greater access to food and shelter, and saw disaster as a threat to their authority, the African-Caribbean population primarily focused on ensuring their own survival in the aftermath of disaster. Moreover, even if they were to write of the abuses they suffered during the relief process it is difficult to conceive of how such records could have survived. Colonial archives have so often been purposely constructed to remove subaltern voices, especially ones that in this context would have no doubt been highly critical of colonial governance.²²

These circumstances have meant that there are almost no non-colonial accounts of disaster. This near total absence of non-colonial sources does not mean colonial sources are taken at face value. Whilst reading colonial sources along the grain can be fruitful, such an approach must also be balanced out by recognising, as Ranajit Guha suggests, that colonial records contain ‘rhetorical slights of hand’.²³ This necessarily leads to an understanding that, for example, what colonial records might refer to as looting can in fact be read as people taking the necessary steps to survive dire circumstances. Furthermore, and specific to this project, it also means considering the longer term implications of colonial responses where others have not. It is not enough to brush over the fact that relief might have taken two years to distribute, one must consider what the implications of such a delay were when other

²² Joan M. Schwartz, Terry Cook, ‘Archives, Records, and Power: The Making of Modern Memory’, *Archival Science*, 2 (2002), pp. 1-19.

²³ Stoler, *Along the Archival Grain*, p. 42.

sources of relief were so limited. However, also in the spirit of Stoler's along-the-grain approach, it also means not discounting the insights that colonial sources can provide. Though not explicitly referential to Stoler, this approach has precedent in Caribbean environmental history. Bonham Richardson's *Igniting the Caribbean's Past* uses a plethora of colonial records, newspapers and contemporary travel writing. Richardson uses these sources to write an environmental history of fire in the region. In particular, in his chapter on 'fires of protest' Richardson uses this source base to examine riots against colonial governance, but also to detail the material consequences and disempowerment that led to such actions.²⁴ Similarly, in *Hurricanes and Society* Matthew Mulcahy uses a similar source base (albeit from an earlier period) to consider the reality of the altered conditions under which the enslaved population laboured after hurricanes.²⁵

The largest portion of this project's source base came from the colonial records housed at The National Archives in London. All of this material is archived under the CO classification and records communications between colonial officials and the Colonial Office. What makes these records an even richer resource is that collected within them are communications submitted by other concerned parties such as groupings of planters, proclamations issued by governors and on occasion, first-hand reports from colonial civil servants. Parliamentary papers from the early part of the nineteenth century are limited in scope and rarely contain more than printed duplications of much of the communications contained within The National Archives. What is more, contrasting early parliamentary papers with CO class records shows that those working to secure relief in Britain left out certain communications. Though the rationale for their removal is not documented, this thesis

²⁴ Bonham C. Richardson, *Igniting the Caribbean's Past: Fire in British West Indian History* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2004), pp. 160-187.

²⁵ Matthew Mulcahy, *Hurricanes and Society in the British Greater Caribbean, 1624-1783* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2006), pp. 94-116.

will later show that an account considered to exaggerate damage and losses could lead to Parliament refusing to provide financial relief. Parliamentary papers dating from the late nineteenth century onwards have a much larger scope, perhaps reflecting an enlarging of their readership. For example, papers pertaining to the Jamaican earthquake of 1907 contain many first-hand accounts not recorded elsewhere. In cases when the debates around relief were recorded this thesis also draws on Parliamentary debates that were accessed through the Hansard Database. Taken together, across all of the events considered in this thesis, these records were essential in building a working overview of a disaster and colonial responses thereafter.

Following a particularly devastating hurricane in 1831, the West India Relief Commission was set up to oversee the relief process. The records of this commission cover not just the 1831 hurricane but also hurricanes in 1834 and 1835. Where in this period Parliamentary papers were limited in scope, these records have been essential in establishing first-hand accounts of the immediate responses people took following these events. These papers primarily consist of communications sent by planters to London and others concerned with the British Caribbean in London. They are useful in that the planters' perspectives provide another angle to these events and not just that of colonial governors and agents. They obviously do not provide a voice to the African-Caribbean population, but they do contain valuable details of how planters were forced to act when their own shelter and investments were destroyed. For example, they can be read in way that shines light on the ad-hoc negotiations planters had to make when sharing the same cramped cellar with those whom they had enslaved.

Overall, colonial sources provide an invaluable resource by which to understand responses to disaster in the days and months that followed these events. However, what they do not provide is a wider sense of the environmental changes wrought by British colonialism

in the region and how the region's built environment was perceived. To this end, travelogues and natural histories have been essential. Travel writing in particular has aided in building a picture of the British Caribbean's rural and built environments. Primarily written by whites from Britain and the U.S., these travellers were keen to highlight differences between their homes and the Caribbean for their audience. As sources for a historian this means that they refer extensively to the environment, particularly in the built environment and adaptations to the climate. It is true that these travellers are almost always white and wealthy meaning that they offer limited insight into the lives of the African-Caribbean population beyond racist appraisals of labour relations in the region. However, their position allows them to make detailed comments on the lives of planters and colonial officials. This is particularly useful in that we can gain insight into the perspectives of those in control of the British Caribbean: those who may also be making key decisions following disasters.

In this respect, travel writing is also useful in that it provides insight into the subtler aspects of how British subjects related to the environment around them. This relation is something which, for chapters two and three, is crucial to understanding the emergence of vulnerabilities in the British Caribbean environment and why little was done to address them. Natural histories have been useful in further helping to identify the environmental issues that were considered of particular note such as soil erosion and fertility. One could argue that travel writing only provides the perspective of the outsider and thus their interpretations are limited in the reality they portray. Planters and colonial officials spent their time writing about administrative matters and not the environment around them and the changes that took place on account of their actions. Consequently, travel writing is one of the only ways we can get a sense of the Caribbean environment and perceptions of it, precisely because the people writing it were outsiders. Furthermore, this outsider perspective is useful in that often travellers challenged the layers of constructed meaning that white elites used to enforce their

vision for the region's environment. For example, David Lambert has shown the extent to which planter rule on Barbados was buttressed and propagandised through and by a 'plantation pastoral' aesthetic that valorised the total cultivation of the land.²⁶ Lambert cites Matthew James Chapman's 1833 poem *Barbados* as a particularly strong example of this 'plantation pastoral' in practice, something which is obvious from the lines:

Each trim plantation like a garden shines – Here waves the cane, there creep the
nurturing vines.²⁷

In distinct contrast, published just two years later, on his arrival to Barbados Robert Madden remarked:

I could see no beauty in this island. If rivers, mountains, and forests are necessary ingredients in the composition of a beautiful landscape, Barbadian scenery has no claim to picturesque attractions.²⁸

In this comparison, the value of contemporary travel writing as a source by which to interrogate the relation of white elites to the environment is abundantly clear. Where the planter saw beauty, the traveller saw desolation. Thus, in a prelude to the second and third chapters, it can begin to be seen why a system that rendered the region more vulnerable to disaster remained relatively unchallenged and unchanged over the course of the long nineteenth century.

²⁶ David Lambert, *White Creole Culture, Politics and Identity during the Age of Abolition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), pp. 178–181.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, p.180.

²⁸ Richard Robert Madden, *A Twelvemonth's Residence in the West Indies, during the Transition from Slavery to Apprenticeship; with Incidental Notice of the State of Society, Prospects, and Natural Resources of Jamaica and Other Islands* (Philadelphia, Carey, Lea and Blanchard, 1835), p. 35.

1 - Situating 'Practical Sympathy'

Whilst an investigation of British responses to nineteenth century disaster has not been previously conducted, this thesis does interface with existing bodies of literature. Firstly, there is the literature that has broadly considered how disaster was responded to within the British Empire. Secondly, in seeking to understand how damaged colonies were rebuilt, but also how natural phenomena were broadly conceived of and prepared for, this thesis necessarily draws on literature that examines the British Empire's relationship with science. There is also the literature that examines British colonialism in the nineteenth-century Caribbean. Specifically, that which examines the organisation of that society and the conceptions of race and labour enforced by British colonialism. Finally, there is the literature that has examined responses to disaster in Caribbean history. A review of these bodies of literature demonstrates there is a very clear gap for this thesis to fill. British disaster relief practices in the Caribbean have been largely ignored. There has been no sustained investigation of how, in the nineteenth century, these events were responded to and what shaped those responses. This gap is worth remedying because, in comparison to other British territories in this period, of the factors unique to the Caribbean such as the use of and transition from coerced labour and the dominance of monoculture on small relatively isolated islands.

1.1 Disaster relief in the British Empire

Though in the second half of the nineteenth century the 'civilising mission' may have added a whiggish gloss to imperial expansion, British colonialism was an enterprise that from its inception was fundamentally grounded in an extractive logic.²⁹ Expansion and extraction

²⁹ Michael Barnett, *Empire of Humanity: A History of Humanitarianism* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2011), p. 62.

could never cease to be a central driver of empire as the entire project was sold to the British people as a ‘self-financing enterprise’.³⁰ Empire was to benefit Britain not burden it. This then begs the question – how does one provide relief when large-scale charitable relief contradicts the idea that empire was to be a ‘self-financing enterprise’ but is otherwise necessitated to continue the extraction of labour and resources?

Though not explicitly in these terms, scholars have largely examined this question in relation to the Great Irish Famine (1845-1852) and periodic famines in India. Though there are a myriad of differences between the form British rule assumed in Ireland, India and the Caribbean and the crises that were being responded to in these colonies, examining this literature is critical. These are the two most widely studied examples of British colonial responses to the impact of natural phenomena, and they lay an essential foundation from which this thesis is able to show the unique characteristics of responses to disaster in the Caribbean.

Phytophthora infestans may have been the proximate cause of the Irish Famine, but there is little doubt that the near total monoculture of the nutritionally poor, ‘lumper’ potato elevated the crisis to devastating levels. The historiography of the famine has largely focused on debating the extent of British culpability, in particular for engendering widespread monoculture and for ideological responses that worsened the crisis.³¹ In contrast, the historiography of Indian famine is less expansive and has tended less to debate British culpability and has more or less condemned British actions universally.³²

³⁰ Ibid, p. 62.

³¹ Emily Mark-FitzGerald, *Commemorating the Irish Famine: Memory and the Monument* (Oxford University Press, 2015), pp. 63–68.

³² Cormac Ó Gráda, *Famine: A Short History* (Princeton, N.J.; Woodstock: Princeton University Press, 2010), pp. 129-158; Mike Davis, *Late Victorian Holocausts: El Niño Famines and the Making of the Third World* (London: Verso, 2001).

From both bodies of historiography a picture emerges of British relief that is above all punitive and conditional. Relief was frequently constructed in a manner that was meant to deter those suffering from starvation from drawing on it, but also in a manner which used the desperation of those desirous of relief for the benefit of the colonial state. In the case of Ireland, Benjamin Reilly's work in *Disaster and Human History* and Cormac Ó Gráda's in *Famine: A History* shows that initially there was no large-scale planned response to famine but that it was only in the face of growing public pressure did Britain intervene.³³

The first British attempt to provide relief to Ireland was spearheaded by Prime Minister Robert Peel. US maize was bought, imported into Ireland and then sold at cost price. Even Reilly who praises this response can only do so by measuring its effect on the market noting that it served to depress grain and potato prices making them more affordable to the poor.³⁴ Conversely, Christine Kinealy argues that Peel's purchase of US grain had, at best, a negligible effect on famine mortality.³⁵ This intervention also demonstrates that even under public pressure relief could not exceed the ideological confines of the mantra that the colonies should be self-financing.

Only when Peel's intervention was considered to have failed did British responses transition from singular intervention to a planned system of relief. However, Reilly reveals however that this system was punitive and purposely constructed to benefit British interests. Food for the starving, like the intervention with maize before it, was not distributed freely but rather was earned through participating in governmental work schemes. These schemes focused on building transport links for commercial farmers, allowing the continued export of

³³ Benjamin Reilly, *Disaster and Human History: Case Studies in Nature, Society and Catastrophe* (Jefferson, N.C: McFarland, 2009).

³⁴ *Ibid*, p. 268.

³⁵ Christine Kinealy, *This Great Calamity: The Irish Famine 1845-52* (New York: Roberts Rinehart Publishers, 1997), pp. 46-55.

food out of Ireland whilst allowing domestic food production to languish.³⁶ Gráda's work conveys the scale of the failure of these schemes which peaked in 1847 when 700,000 Irish were employed, yet with no protection from the weather and sub-standard wages, the famine continued unabated.³⁷ What is more, these schemes were established through loans – not grants - provided by the British government so that ultimately the Irish landowners and taxpayers paid for their own relief.³⁸

During the course of famines in India, those suffering from starvation were similarly coerced into work for relief schemes that often provided less calories than were expended to earn them.³⁹ In this respect, Mike Davis' work shows similarities between British responses in Ireland and India, but it also shows that there was a definite harshening of these practices in India. Whilst Ireland was never explicitly referred to as a colonial possession, there was no question of India's status. Instead, in relation to relief, the question was why Britain should have to pay 'tribute' to India for having conquered it.⁴⁰ As a consequence, the self-financing doctrine appears to have, more than ever, been a primary shaper of relief. In India, not only were public work schemes implemented, but distance tests were also introduced. In what appears to have been an effort to create hurdles by which to further disqualify claimants labourers were only allowed to participate in public works at least ten miles from their homes.⁴¹ What is more, in contrast to Ireland, the works schemes in India rarely even had utility for colonial governance, unconnected roads to nowhere were built simply to put the starving to work.⁴²

³⁶ Ibid, p. 270.

³⁷ Ó Gráda, *Famine*, p. 214.

³⁸ Ibid, p. 214.

³⁹ Davis, *Late Victorian Holocausts*.

⁴⁰ Ibid, p. 37.

⁴¹ Ibid, p. 37.

⁴² Ibid, p. 37.

Vinita Damodaran's study of famine relief during the 1897 Bengal famine makes some similar, but nonetheless important, points to Davis: relief funds were entirely inadequate and public works formed the backbone of British responses.⁴³ However, Damodaran advances the literature in this area by exploring how Indians responded to these so-called 'relief' efforts. Many viewed British relief practices with deep suspicion and instead attempted to re-engage with traditional famine coping methods and subsided off nearby forests.⁴⁴ However, the decreased participation in public works schemes led administrators to perceive a lack of need, meaning that many of the schemes were closed just as the death rate began increasing following a severe crop failure in 1896.⁴⁵

A number of historians have shown how these moments of crisis were often taken advantage of by colonial authorities however, Reilly is one of the few to have shown how this taking advantage fitted in wider colonial objectives for the colonies. His work shows that in Ireland, Britain had long wanted to reform Irish agriculture, reorganising it into larger farms. The upheaval and loss of life caused by the famine allowed the British government to begin implementing these changes.⁴⁶ Reilly is one of the few scholars to explore this opportunistic side to relief. How colonial administrations used disaster and widespread destitution to their advantage is an under-examined area of British relief that will be examined in great detail in this thesis – thus giving us a greater understanding of the contradictions of British relief and some of its motives. The exploitation of crises, particularly ones resulting from natural hazards, is something that through the work of Naomi Klein in *Shock Doctrine* has received

⁴³ Vinita Damodaran, 'Famine in Bengal: A Comparison of the 1770 Famine in Bengal and the 1897 Famine in Chotanagpur', in *Natural Disasters, Cultural Responses: Case Studies towards a Global Environmental History*, ed. by Christof Mauch and Christian Pfister (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2009), pp. 217-218.

⁴⁴ *Ibid*, p. 224.

⁴⁵ *Ibid*, p. 224.

⁴⁶ *Ibid*, p. 272.

much focus in the modern context, but as of yet there has been little examination of its historical precedent, a trend this thesis aims in part to reverse.⁴⁷

Ultimately, that the need for relief was often seen as an opportunity to impose discipline and further wider colonial goals shows the extent to which the ideological constraints that guided British domestic poor relief were transmitted to the colonies. Joanna Innes shows that what initially began with the sixteenth-century Elizabethan Poor laws as a ‘fragmented’, diffuse system of charity briefs, donated at various parishes and supplemented other diverse ‘non-codified methods’ began to change by the late eighteenth century.⁴⁸ As institutions emerged designed specifically to deal with pauperism so did a public and political backlash against the perceived encouragement of charity dependence.⁴⁹ In this changing climate scholars such as Samantha Shave, Jeremy Seabrook and Niall O’ Flaherty argue that above all the ideas of Thomas Malthus shaped the extremely punitive direction of nineteenth-century poor relief that coalesced early on in the form of the 1834 New Poor Law Amendment.⁵⁰ It is worth noting that as Seabrook argues there has always been a strong punitive tradition at the heart of domestic poor relief policies; work had always been advocated as the best remedy for pauperism.⁵¹ However, Seabrook does argue that what changed in 1834 was that the Amendment was designed not to end poverty but to break the ‘paupership habit’.⁵²

⁴⁷ Naomi Klein, *The Shock Doctrine: The Rise of Disaster Capitalism* (Ontario: Knopf Canada, 2007).

⁴⁸ Joanna Innes, ‘The “mixed economy of welfare” in early modern England: assessments of the options from Hale to Malthus (c.1683-1803)’, in *Charity, Self-Interest and Welfare in Britain*, ed. by Martin Daunton (London: Routledge, 1996 p. 140).

⁴⁹ *Ibid*, pp. 123-124.

⁵⁰ Samantha A. Shave, *Pauper Policies: Poor Law Practice in England, 1780-1850* (Oxford University Press, 2017); Jeremy Seabrook, *Pauperland: Poverty and the Poor in Britain* (London: S.I. C Hurst & Co, 2015); Niall O’ Flaherty, ‘Malthus and the “End of Poverty”’, in *New Perspectives on Malthus*, ed. by Robert J. Mayhew (Cambridge: Univeristy of Cambridge Press, 2016), pp. 74–103.

⁵¹ Seabrook, *Pauperland*, p. 39.

⁵² *Ibid*, p. 84.

The transmission of attitudes from Britain to its colonies is clear in the similarities by which relief was distributed; public works were used to make the ‘able-bodied’ earn their relief and otherwise discourage other potential applicants. These schemes were constrained by an ideological fixation with limiting state intervention and expenditure. Malthus himself taught History and Political Economy at the Imperial Service College, where students were trained for deployment around the Empire.⁵³ Geoffrey Hodgson argues that even with his death the spirit of Malthusian political economy lived on at the college until 1858, as a fellow acolyte the Reverend Richard Jones took his position.⁵⁴

If the similarities with British domestic poor relief are clear, what has been little studied is how these policies changed when deployed in the colonies. From an assessment of the literature it is evident that there is a clear sharpening of the punitive aspects of British relief in their implementation in India. Even though there are useful comparisons to be made about the ideological underpinnings of responses to famine in Ireland and India, there are important and often unexamined differences between the two. In her book *The Great Irish Famine*, Kinealy is one of the few to examine the role private charity played in Ireland.⁵⁵ Viewed as the most acceptable form of assistance by many politicians, organisations like the British Relief Association raised £500,000 by 1848.⁵⁶ In the case of Indian famines, private charity was not forthcoming; why should Britain pay ‘tribute’ to a conquered people?⁵⁷ Similarly, as this thesis will demonstrate, for most of the nineteenth century private charity played little to no role in augmenting British relief in Caribbean.

⁵³ Liam Sims, ‘Malthus in Cambridge’, *Cambridge University Special Collections*, 2016, <<https://specialcollections.blog.lib.cam.ac.uk/?p=11842>>, [30/08/2017].

⁵⁴ Geoffrey M. Hodgson, ‘Malthus, Thomas Robert (1766-1834)’, in *Biographical Dictionary of British Economists*, ed. by Donald Rutherford (Bristol: Thoemmes Continuum, 2004), pp. 1–6.

⁵⁵ Christine Kinealy, *The Great Irish Famine: Impact, Ideology and Rebellion* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2002), p.61.

⁵⁶ *Ibid*, p. 61, 72-73.

⁵⁷ *Ibid*, p. 37.

There has been no study of British relief practices adapted to the Caribbean environment. British colonies in the Caribbean were subjected to hurricanes, earthquakes and eruption, all rapid onset hazards with very different implications to famine. Unlike in Ireland and India where colonial officials were able to shield themselves from famine by securing their own supply of food or otherwise being able to meet its inflated cost, hazards in the Caribbean threatened the physical foundations of colonial power. The natural hazards of the Caribbean destroyed barracks, police stations and colonial residences. The governing classes often found themselves without shelter or the access to the military force that otherwise enabled their rule.

Further warranting investigation is the interaction of relief processes with the shifting landscape of labour unique to the Caribbean. The nineteenth century saw the transition from slave labour to controlled apprenticeships and finally notionally free labour. Whilst these repressive systems were enforced, fear of rebellion plagued the white minority but even with the dissolution of coerced labour that fear remained and was in fact magnified by a fear that there would be violent reprisals from a vengeful labouring population. What is more, contrary to British rule in Ireland and India, in the Caribbean there was a significant proportion of the white population who owned near all the land, the so-called plantocracy, who often were at odds with colonial governance and sought particularly during periods of crisis to shore up their position. The gap in the literature regarding British colonial relief practices is clear and by investigating those factors unique to the British Caribbean; the form of coerced labour used and the domination of the plantation, this thesis will go some way to filling that gap by showing how these effected disaster response.

1.2 Scientific knowledge and the British Empire

Nature-induced disasters affect not just humans, but also impact heavily on the built environment. The frequency of hazard impacts throughout the Empire meant that both homes and infrastructure were frequently rebuilt. This section is concerned with understanding if and then how science was used to guard against disaster and shape strategies of resilience against natural phenomena. That science played a significant role in the expansion of the British Empire is not in contention; as Richard Drayton puts it, science supported British expansion ‘from the age of Raleigh to that of Curzon and Nehru’.⁵⁸ The central debate in this body of literature has been over the nature of this relationship. Scholars have argued over whether science in the Empire existed merely as a ‘tool’ by which to further resource extraction and economic profit or whether it ever existed in a ‘pure’ form outside of the directives of empire. Earlier studies such as Daniel Headrick’s *The Tools of Empire* have tended to argue the former; in its usage in the scheme of empire, science simply became a ‘tool’.⁵⁹ Over time, a counterpoint has emerged with scholars such as S. Ravi Rajan arguing that whilst science was frequently co-opted in the exploitative schema of empire, it was also capable of existing as a distinctly separate identity, outside of simply enabling further colonial expansion.⁶⁰

As this body of historiography has focused on this debate, there has been little study of how science intersected with colonial responses to disaster. In chapter three, this thesis shows that science in the nineteenth-century British Caribbean was utilised to study the natural hazards of the Caribbean but that that knowledge was rarely ever deployed in the region. At least in the Caribbean, the pattern that the use of science follows appears to reflect

⁵⁸ Richard Drayton, ‘Science, Medicine, and the British Empire’, in *Oxford History of the British Empire, Vol V, Historiography*, ed. by Robin W. Winks and Alaine Low (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), p. 264.

⁵⁹ Daniel Headrick, *The Tools of Empire: Technology and European Imperialism in the Nineteenth Century* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1981).

⁶⁰ S. Ravi Rajan, *Modernizing Nature: Forestry and Imperial Eco-Development 1800-1950* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2006), pp. 4-5.

early characterisation in which it was used simply to further expansion and extraction. This thesis can go some way to showing that, just like relief practices, the deployment of scientific knowledge was deeply informed by the wider priorities of those in control of the Empire. Further to this, what also emerges from a survey of this literature with implications for this thesis is that, unlike the case of British relief practices, the Caribbean region itself has not been entirely neglected as an area of study. Rather, the majority of the studies that have focused on the Caribbean have looked at its ecology and the development of botanical sciences.

The study of the relationship between the British Empire and science is an area of study that is in its relative infancy. Early forerunners such as Charles Foreman in his 1941 thesis *Science for Empire* and George Basalla in his 1967 book *The Spread of Western Science* focused on establishing the idea that science had a supporting role in the expansion of empire.⁶¹ However, it was not until 1979 in Michael Worboys' thesis *Science and British Colonial Imperialism* that the actual mechanics of how science was utilised in the British Empire were first examined.

Worboys' thesis is also important because it was one of the few works that considers, not just the intersection of empire and science, but how these interacted in the Caribbean. Of the part that examines the Caribbean, his thesis studies Secretary of State for the Colonies Joseph Chamberlin's attempts from 1895 onwards to resuscitate the region's flagging economy through the introduction of new cash crops such as cocoa.⁶² Unlike later studies, the strength of Worboys' thesis comes from the fact that it shows how Parliament held the keys

⁶¹ Michael Worboys, 'Science and British Colonial Imperialism' (unpublished PhD thesis, University of Sussex, 1979), p. 13;

Deepack Kumar, 'Colony and Science: A Study of British India', in *History of Science, Philosophy and Culture in Indian Civilization*, Vol XV, Part 1, ed. by D. P. Chattopadhyaya (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), p. 89.

⁶² *Ibid*, p. 41

to scientific funding and ultimately in this case the motivating mandate given to Chamberlain was profitability. With that mandate Chamberlain funded the founding of a central department of agriculture for the West Indies with an overall goal of diversifying the region's agriculture.⁶³ Worboys' thesis is useful in that it clearly demonstrates how profit could drive colonial scientific ventures, and relates to later interventions this thesis will examine to restore and further protect cocoa planting after the hurricane of 1898. However, Worboys' thesis is primarily focused on agricultural developments. This thesis aims to broaden knowledge regarding the use of meteorological science in the Caribbean, an area that although studied to some extent in the Indian context has received almost no attention in the Caribbean context.

Daniel Headrick's *The Tentacles of Progress* is regarded as one of the best studies of science in the British Empire.⁶⁴ Published in 1988, it is an expansion of his earlier 1981 work *The Tools of Empire*.⁶⁵ In the context of this thesis, the chapter 'Hydraulic Imperialism in India' is of particular import. This is not just because it relates to the intersection of empire, science and natural phenomena, but because it provides a window to the historiographical disagreements surrounding science and empire. Headrick gives an effective account of the development of the many canal and irrigation building projects the British pursued with a desire to attempt to limit the effects of famine and increase crop growth.

John Mackenzie however critiques Headrick for taking the 'Europeans too much at their estimation'.⁶⁶ For Mackenzie, much of Headrick's work espouses the same congratulatory confidence colonialists had in their technological prowess that they often used

⁶³ Ibid, p. 41

⁶⁴ Daniel Headrick, *The Tentacles of Progress: Technology Transfer in the Age of Imperialism, 1850-1940* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988).

⁶⁵ Headrick, *The Tools of Empire*.

⁶⁶ John Mackenzie, 'Empire and the ecological apocalypse: the historiography of the imperial environment', in *Ecology & Empire: Environmental History of Settler Societies*, ed. by Tom Griffiths, Libby Robin (Edinburgh: Keele University Press, 1997), p. 216.

to justify the expansion of the British Empire. By way of simple contrast, what Headrick would refer to as ‘hydraulic imperialism’, Mackenzie would refer to as ‘hydraulic despotism’.⁶⁷ In Headrick’s words, ‘as the late nineteenth century drew to a close irrigation works seemed to have accomplished a great deal of good’, ‘[the] systems...did little but feed millions of Indians’.⁶⁸ Conversely, Davis in *Late Victorian Holocausts* argues that whilst canals and other irrigations projects may have produced ‘short-term bonanzas’ they not only increased the soil salinity but also lowered the water table, undermining traditional forms of irrigation fed by wells.⁶⁹ Perhaps, however, the most disastrous knock-on effect of colonial irrigation was the way in which they pooled large swathes of brackish water, providing the perfect conditions for anopheles, malaria spreading mosquitoes which in turn killed many more Indians.⁷⁰

Davis’ work not only offers a clear rebuke to Headrick’s congratulatory conclusions, but exposes two issues at the heart of studying colonialism and science. British colonialism was fundamentally grounded in an economic logic and this extends to its utilisation of science, something Headrick overlooks despite the evidence, at least in this case, being clear. Whilst publically Sir Richard and Sir John Strachey, in Davis’ words, deemed British rule in India as ‘the most extraordinary act of charity’, it was privately expressed that ‘revenues...should be the end and aim of all canal administration’.⁷¹

Broadening out the focus from just hydraulic science Tirthanker Roy’s article *The Law of Storms* examines the little-studied development of meteorological science in the Indian Ocean.⁷² Secondly, like Mackenzie and Davis, Roy’s article has strength because it

⁶⁷ Ibid, p. 217.

⁶⁸ Headrick, *The Tentacles of Progress*, p. 195.

⁶⁹ Ibid, p. 333.

⁷⁰ Ibid, p. 333.

⁷¹ Ibid, pp. 331-333.

⁷² Tirthanker Roy, ‘The Law of Storms’: European and Indigenous Response to Natural Disasters in Colonial India, c. 1800-1850’, *Australian Economic History Review*, 50:1 (2010).

approaches the consequences of British scientific intervention critically. He explores the effect scientific intervention had on those living under British rule in India. Taking first his examination of embankments (constructed as part of irrigation programmes), Roy brings to the fore many of the same points Davis does, but given that it is the main focus of his article he is able to bring a greater sense of detail than Davis. In India, embankments were, for many communities, the traditional defence against floods. However, Roy argues, directly referencing Headrick, that under British rule embankments became just another ‘tool of empire’, used to control Indian peasant societies.⁷³ For the British, an embankment became a source of income, allowing river water to be controlled and drawn off for irrigation, later also forming the beds for railway tracks.

Roy argues that to minimise financial risk for the state, officers farmed out the task of building embankments to private landlords (zamindars). The state was unwilling to pay the full cost. Roy also uses the example of these embankments to attempt to qualify Headrick’s assertion that science was a ‘tool’ of empire.⁷⁴ Not only was the building of embankments a traditional method of flood prevention, the state was, albeit ineffectively, funding local experts to build them.⁷⁵ The critical point this section of Roy’s article brings to the fore, evidenced by its unwillingness to entirely fund embankment projects, was that even when it benefited both state and civil society there was resistance to engaging in large-scale public works.

The other half of Roy’s article focuses on the development of meteorological science in the Indian Ocean, a topic that has particular relevance to this thesis as it goes some way to illuminating British colonial perceptions of tropical cyclones. Colonial research into cyclones

⁷³ Ibid, p. 12.

⁷⁴ Ibid, p. 8.

⁷⁵ Ibid, p. 8.

began in the early nineteenth century, though crucially the project began in earnest, not because of a top-down administrative drive, but rather from the efforts of one man, Henry Piddington. Piddington collected data from the logs of wrecked ships, distilling it into ‘the law of storms’ published in the *Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bengal*. Considering that Roy is attempting to argue for a greater acknowledgement of artisanal knowledge in colonial science in India, it would more useful if he had delineated what variety of ships the log data was being collected from: solely British ships or also from Indian mariners, who would no doubt have greater experience manoeuvring around the cyclones of the Indian Ocean. In effect, Roy argues, Piddington was taking artisanal knowledge, the log books and accounts of sailors, and using it for state benefit. Roy is keen to point out that this use of artisanal knowledge is embedded in British attempts to predict storms throughout the nineteenth century. He suggests that the later development of colonial meteorology in India by H.F. Blanford, by stressing the need for observation, acted as a bridge between artisanal methods.

Crucially, what can be drawn from Roy’s examination of both embankment building and meteorological developments is that even when the state stood to benefit, as was the case with flood defences, it was unwilling to bankroll large-scale experiments; arguably the ‘self-financing enterprise’ aspect of empire was causing this reticence. Furthermore, when innovation did occur, as was the case in the work of Piddington, it came from an individual despite, again, the utility his work had for the state. This thesis will show that in contrast to India, in the Caribbean near all developments related to hazards were abandoned or never pursued.

George Valhakis is one of the few scholars to expand on meteorological science in British-ruled India, devoting a chapter of his book *Imperialism and Science: Social Impact and Interaction* to it. To demonstrate the strength of artisanal knowledge, Roy’s work is

somewhat triumphalist of the successes of British meteorology in the Indian Ocean.⁷⁶

Valhakis argues however that British success in predicting storms was far more limited.

Valhakis suggests that there was a complete lack of effective instruments, personnel and a standardised method, meaning that many of the observation stations were largely useless.

Valhakis goes as far as to suggest that even by 1874 when there were seventy seven stations across India, a lack of centralised control rendered the results poor. Valhakis argues that even when H.F. Blanford seized the initiative and sought to standardise methods for cyclone observation, climatic scientists remained on the ‘fringes of importance’ in the corpus of empire.⁷⁷

Both Roy and Valhakis’ work reflects how at certain points the British administration expressed a reticence to expend capital on scientific research despite it having potential benefits for the protection or even expansion of profit. This is a relatively unexplored area in the historiography of empire and science. This thesis expands on this area significantly. It shows how interests related to imperial sovereignty and more generally a falling interest in the Caribbean as it lost profitably shaped the application of science in the region despite pressure from private individuals to the contrary.⁷⁸

It is clear that given propensity of works in this field to focus on British experiences in India that this thesis, focusing on the Caribbean, will in a way broaden our understanding of how science was utilised across the Empire. Worboys’ 1979 thesis is one of the few to explore the application of science in the British Caribbean, but this largely focused on its effects on agricultural development.⁷⁹ Consequently, as much of this thesis will engage with tropical

⁷⁶ Ibid, p. 8.

⁷⁷ George Valhakis, *Imperialism and Science: Social Impact and Interaction* (Santa Barbara: ABC-CLIO, 2006), p. 10.

⁷⁸ Elsa V. Goveia, *A Study on the Historiography of the British West Indies to the End of the Nineteenth Century* (Washington, D.C.: Howard University Press, 1956), p. 146.

⁷⁹ Worboys, ‘Science and British Colonial Imperialism’, p. 41.

cyclones, seismic events and the effect the advent of the telegraph had on colonial disaster responses, it can only broaden our understanding of how science was utilised in the British Caribbean.

1.3 The Post-emancipation Caribbean

The abolition of slavery in 1834 was followed by a system of apprenticeship that re-tied the former enslaved to the plantation and forced them to be a 'slave on weekdays and a wage earner over the weekend'.⁸⁰ Even after the ending of apprenticeship in 1838, historians have broadly agreed that oppression continued post-emancipation. Where there has been less agreement between historians is how labour re-organised itself and to what degree former slaves were able to exert their new, but limited freedoms. These arguments have engendered the creation of a historiography primarily occupied with labour relations, and one that has retained a focus on the plantation. Traditionally, scholars have tended to study 'the post-slavery labour problem' as Woodville K. Marshall puts it, as opposed to the Caribbean in the post-emancipation period.⁸¹ Excepting the works of Simon Smith, Matthew Mulcahy and Stuart Schwartz, whose work will be addressed in greater detail later, the focus on the region's labour problem has meant that the impact of natural hazards has not been directly studied. That is not say they have been completely ignored, rather they are mentioned in studies of the region's shifting labour relations but as isolated events or simply as part of the background of the Caribbean environment.⁸²

⁸⁰ Sidney Mintz, *Caribbean Transformations* (Piscataway, NJ: Aldine Transaction, 1974), p. 206.

⁸¹ Woodville K. Marshall, 'The Post-Slavery Labour Problem Revisited', in *Slavery, Freedom and Gender: The Dynamics of Caribbean Society*, ed. by Brian L. Moore, B.W. Higman, Carl Campbell and Patrick Bryan (Kingston: University of West Indies Press, 2003), p. 115.

⁸² Lambert, *White Creole Culture, Politics and Identity during the Age of Abolition*.

As Simon Smith puts it, traditionally literature that has focused on the Caribbean has treated hurricanes and other hazards as exogenous shocks whereas this thesis adopts the perspective that they are in fact endogenous.⁸³ Chapter two will show that the organization of the Caribbean around the plantation had serious implications for the vulnerability of the islands. Furthermore, this thesis studies the responses to disaster not in isolation but thematically, drawing together the links between each event. The other hallmark of the ‘the post-slavery labour problem’ body of literature has been its geographic focus on Jamaica. Conversely, this thesis has a far broader geographic focus as hazards impacted hardest on some of the smaller less ‘important’ British colonies such as Antigua and Dominica.

The crises begat by the impact of natural hazards often threatened the breakdown of colonial control. Studying responses to disaster offers a unique window on the nineteenth century Caribbean and an opportunity by which to widen our understanding of that society after emancipation. In this context, work that has examined how racial attitudes changed over the nineteenth century has been of particular use in contextualising many of the actions taken by colonial officials and the plantocracy. In one of the early defining works in this area of study Elsa Goveia asserted that racist attitudes to a degree softened over the nineteenth century. Although her work remains a landmark, more recent historiography has somewhat contradicted Goveia on this point. In the considerably more recent book *The Problem of Freedom* Thomas Holt argues that, if anything, attitudes in the British Caribbean hardened over the course of the nineteenth century. Holt insightfully argues that in the post-emancipation era, racism reasserted itself as an important ‘solvent’ for white control once the ‘great experiment’ was deemed to have failed.⁸⁴ Racial characterisations of former slaves as

⁸³ S. D. Smith, ‘Storm Hazard and Slavery: The Impact of the 1831 Great Caribbean Hurricane on St Vincent’, *Environment and History*, 18.1 (2012), p. 100.

⁸⁴ Thomas C. Holt, *The Problem of Freedom: Race, Labor, and Politics in Jamaica and Britain, 1832-1938* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1992), p. 215.

lazy and lacking in inherent self-discipline were easy ways to explain the perceived failure of emancipation without having to consider planters' own inability to adapt.⁸⁵ Holt suggests that incidents like the Morant Bay Rebellion only further hardened these attitudes and increased acceptance that control of the West Indies was simply part of the white man's burden.⁸⁶

In his article *Systems of Domination After Slavery*, Nigel Bolland argues that white domination continued to persist in the post-emancipation era through white control of both land and labour, while civil institutions such as the courts and police forces all evolved to continue enforcing this domination.⁸⁷ Bolland's work echoes that of Woodville K. Marshall who warned historians not to posit 'too extreme a discontinuity' in people's lives 'before and after' 1838.⁸⁸ That said, Bolland presents a more nuanced position when he argues that whilst domination persisted, its 'relations changed'.⁸⁹

That said, this body of literature does largely agree on there being key continuities between the systems. There has however been debate on how far this concept is applicable to the indentured Indian labourers brought in to shore up the plantations. Hugh Tinker, in his book *A New System of Slavery*, argues that the systems of apprenticeship and indenture were just as exploitative and inhumane as the system of slavery that preceded it.⁹⁰ In Tinker's eyes the indentured labourer's mental and physical experience of the plantation was almost identical to the slaves that they replaced.⁹¹ Both Pieter Emmer and David Northrup have critiqued elements of the continuity thesis, arguing that there was a significant difference of

⁸⁵ Ibid, p. 215.

⁸⁶ Ibid, p. 314.

⁸⁷ Ibid, p. 121.

⁸⁸ Bridget Brereton, 'Woodville Marshall and Caribbean History', in *In the Shadow of the Plantation: Caribbean History and its Legacy*, ed. by Alvin O. Thompson (Jamaica: Ian Randle, 2002), p.8.

⁸⁹ Nigel Bolland, 'Systems of Domination After Slavery: The Control of Land and Labour in the British West Indies After 1838', *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 23:4 (1981), p. 120.

⁹⁰ Hugh Tinker, *A New System of Slavery: Export of Indian Labour Overseas, 1830-1920*, First Edition edition (London, New York: Oxford University Press, 1974), p. xv.

⁹¹ Ibid, pp. 177-181.

experience for indentured labourers from India.⁹² That said, as Emmer admits, critiques of the continuity have by necessity been based on circumstantial evidence and as this thesis will show at least in the case of disaster response there was a strong continuity of experience for the African-Caribbean population.⁹³

This thesis will expand our understanding of post-emancipation relations by demonstrating that in the moments of flux and disruption presented by disaster, the new complexities of post-emancipation relations often faded as the blunt bifurcation between white and black made a stark emergence. Consideration of the complexities of post-emancipation everyday life remains important however to fully understand the manner in which white elites sought to reinstate their control post-disaster. Jonathan Dalby in his article *Moral Panic and the discovery of sexual deviance in post-Emancipation Jamaica*, examines not only the increased fear whites felt post-emancipation but also the way in which they sought to limit African-Caribbean freedom.⁹⁴ One particular discourse which was deployed with that aim was the ‘quashee’ stereotype. This stereotype suggested that African-Caribbean people were inherently predisposed to laziness and idleness and needed strong rules to guide them.⁹⁵ Planters used this stereotype to argue that slavery was prematurely ended and that it was the loss of discipline that engendered these outbreak of deviancy. Dalby’s findings resonate with events examined in this thesis and are useful for contextualising the actions of the colonial authorities following disasters. Officials recurrently justified limiting access to relief by means of public work style schemes because they curbed laziness and provided

⁹² David Northrup, *Indentured Labor in the Age of Imperialism, 1834-1922* (Cambridge: Cambridge University of Press, 1995); P. C. Emmer, ‘The Meek Hindu; the Recruitment of Indian Indentured Labourers for Service Overseas, 1870–1916’, in *Colonialism and Migration; Indentured Labour Before and After Slavery*, ed. by P. C. Emmer, Comparative Studies in Overseas History (Springer, Dordrecht, 1986), pp. 187–207.

⁹³ P. C. Emmer, ‘The Big Disappointment. The economic consequences of the abolition of slavery in the Caribbean, 1833-1888’, *History in Focus*, 2007, <<https://www.history.ac.uk/ihr/Focus/Slavery/articles/emmer.html>>, [14/08/2017].

⁹⁴ Jonathan R. Dalby, ‘“Such a Mass of Disgusting and Revolting Cases”: Moral Panic and the “Discovery” of Sexual Deviance in Post-Emancipation Jamaica (1835–1855)’, *Slavery & Abolition*, 36.1 (2015).

⁹⁵ *Ibid*, pp. 148-149.

structure for those who it was perceived would otherwise incite civil unrest without strict orders.

Mimi Sheller also highlights how complexities of post-emancipation relations were elevated in the urban environment. In her article *Quasheba, Mother, Queen* she argues that women turned 'everyday activities into sites of resistance [and] ordinary space into theatres for action' therefore reinforcing this concept of the post-emancipation Caribbean as a space of low-level constant resistance.⁹⁶ Sheller's article is particularly important as it demonstrates that of all African-Caribbean gatherings, urban ones were the most feared.

Despite Sheller's article, it remains true that the urban environment has had scant examination in Caribbean historiography. Pedro Welch is the scholar who has expanded this area study to the greatest degree particular in relation to Barbados' capital Bridgetown. Welch argues that in urban centres whites found it particularly difficult to maintain many elements of the structures of power that functioned in rural contexts. Specifically, whites found it hard to maintain the distance between themselves and former slaves that they were otherwise able to in rural areas.⁹⁷ In effect, Welch suggests that urban centres had some form of limited levelling effect as these people had to live in the same shared spaces. Welch also argues that living in Bridgetown gave former slaves access to a wider world of ideas and experiences.⁹⁸ Welch is suggesting that it was harder to dominate and oppress former slaves who began to enlarge a world previously restricted to the confines of the plantation. What is more, urban areas placed greater emphasis on individualised work, eroding the homogenised and easier to control mentality of gang labour.⁹⁹ In the case of Bridgetown, Welch argues that

⁹⁶ Mimi Sheller, 'Quasheba, Mother, Queen: Black Women's Public Leadership and Political Protest in Post-emancipation Jamaica, 1834–65', *Slavery & Abolition*, 19.3 (1998), p. 90.

⁹⁷ Pedro Welch, *Slave Society in the City: Bridgetown Barbados 1680-1834* (Kingston; Miami; Oxford: EDS Publications Ltd., 2004).

⁹⁸ *Ibid*, p. 272.

⁹⁹ *Ibid*, p. 274.

in totality these experiences engendered a ‘self-confidence’ in the urban former enslaved community that led to many confrontations with the local police force.¹⁰⁰

Bonham C. Richardson’s book *Igniting the Caribbean’s Past* is a work of environmental history that goes some way to further uncovering the forgotten urban dimension of post-emancipation Caribbean historiography. Richardson focuses specifically on the role fire has played in the history of post-emancipation Caribbean and in doing so makes a vital contribution to the existing historiography. In particular, Richardson foregrounds the almost omnipresent fear the white ruling classes had of freed blacks in the urban context, something that was made even more acute with the onset of economic depression from the 1880s onwards.¹⁰¹ Fires that had usually been associated with rural-based celebrations that whites had already struggled to control became, in the urban context, far more dangerous not only for their potential to damage colonial property but also because they became associated with violent and angry protest.¹⁰²

Welch and Richardson’s work is critical to gaining an understanding of the many social factors that contributed to heightened racial tensions in the urban context. However, even taking into account Welch and Richardson’s work, there is still a significant enough lacuna in this area for this thesis to make valuable contributions. Welch’s work is a single chapter with a case study on Bridgetown, Barbados; obviously the scale of this thesis is much greater. With regards to Richardson’s work, *Igniting the Caribbean’s Past* only covers the period 1885-1910, leaving not only more work to be done in terms of exploring urban experiences on a wider temporal scale, but also with fire as Richardson’s focus, this thesis

¹⁰⁰ Ibid, p. 274.

¹⁰¹ Richardson, *Igniting the Caribbean’s Past*, pp. 160-187.

¹⁰² Ibid, pp. 160-187.

with its focus on other natural phenomena can still make a contribution even covering the same timeframe.

Where this thesis goes beyond Sheller, Welch and Richardson's work is that by examining responses to nature-induced disasters, it can shed new light on how crisis was dealt with in the urban environment. Even though disasters primarily affected rural areas, urban centres were often the place that the African-Caribbean population headed to for shelter and relief. These were moments where fear surrounding the urban space and large gatherings was exacerbated far beyond that which is examined in Sheller's work. People required government assistance – shelter, provisions and medical supplies - that was usually denied or delayed despite being surrounded by warehouses and shops containing many of these things. Requests for the quick delivery of relief and then the location of relief distribution centres were designed specifically to aid in the diffusing of large-scale urban gatherings. What is more, urban congregations particularly after hurricanes which brought flooding often increased the risk of the outbreak of waterborne diseases. Therefore, the colonial authorities often tried to force many labourers to focus their energies on removing corpses to limit the potential for disease without first providing them with relief.

1.4 Disasters in Caribbean history

The final part of this review considers the limited number of texts that have examined disaster in the Caribbean directly. The first is Matthew Mulcahy's *Hurricanes and Society in the British Greater Caribbean: 1624-1783*. Whilst not covering the nineteenth century, this work remains of central importance to this thesis. British Caribbean society in the seventeenth and eighteenth century is a well-tilled area of study, but Mulcahy's work provides a different perspective to that of many scholars in the field thus providing insights

that they have not. He is the first scholar to provide a detailed examination of how British Caribbean society across the seventeenth and eighteenth century responded to hurricanes. Arguably, the fresh insight Mulcahy is able to bring to this area of study is indicative of the value and potential of an environmental perspective on history. Thus in turn this success demonstrates the benefit of bringing the environmental perspective to the study of the nineteenth century British Caribbean.

The obvious distinction between Mulcahy's work and this thesis is the period of study. Mulcahy focuses exclusively on the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, whereas this thesis is focused solely on the nineteenth century. Though Mulcahy provides the best examination of disaster impacts in this period (because of his exogenous perspective) his work is emblematic of an overall trend of work on Caribbean disasters. Scholars have focused both specifically on hurricanes and events in the eighteenth century. Regarding the temporal focus there has been a trend towards examining hurricanes in the eighteenth century for a number of reasons. Firstly, there were no significant hazard impacts from eruptions or earthquakes during this century. Secondly, events that occurred towards the end of the eighteenth century took place in a period of great upheaval predicated by the American War for Independence. Whilst there was limited fighting in the British Caribbean, it caused significant upheaval in terms of the economic viability of British colonies as they were affected by trade disruption that spawned questions over the loyalty of the plantocracy. Thus there has been interest in the role the environment played in exacerbating upheaval in this period.¹⁰³ Conversely, the nineteenth century for the most part marks a cooling of British and American hostilities, which is one reason why it has perhaps received less attention. However, in this relatively understudied period, this thesis will show that even non-violent

¹⁰³ A.J. Berland, 'Extreme weather and social vulnerability in colonial Antigua, Lesser Antilles, 1770-1890', (PhD thesis, University of Nottingham, 2015).

British and American relations played a significant role in shaping British responses to disaster. Thirdly and finally, it can be argued that events in the eighteenth century have received greater attention simply because for the most part they engendered greater casualties than events in nineteenth century. This is a point supported by the fact that where nineteenth century events have been examined at all, they are usually the ones that caused significant casualties. The hurricane of 1831 is mentioned in several studies of Barbados and the Jamaican earthquake of 1907 has received attention from William Tilchin (though overall, it bears repeating that events in the nineteenth century remain understudied). This thesis demonstrates that the significance of a disaster lies not necessarily in the number of casualties it caused. The earthquake of 1843 killed six people in Antigua, but the scale of the property damage shaped the island's development in the decades that followed.

Mulcahy's work remains an indispensable point of comparison by which this thesis is able to examine how British responses changed over the nineteenth century but also across British occupation of the Caribbean. His book makes many valuable points that are important when considering British responses to Caribbean hurricanes. One of the most interesting of these points is that, despite the repeated suffering hurricanes brought, governmental relief for colonists was never a certainty; aid was more often than not motivated by political concerns. For example, Mulcahy argues that in 1780, following one of the most damaging Caribbean hurricanes experienced up until that point, it was actually fear of an opportunistic American attack on vulnerable British colonies that motivated Parliamentary aid ahead of a desire to alleviate suffering.¹⁰⁴ Secondly, from Mulcahy's work it is clear that there was little systemic adaption by the colonists to the hazards they faced, in fact, just how little adaptation there was is striking. Thirdly, from Mulcahy's work it is also striking that despite perhaps providing the opportunity for an uprising, hurricanes almost never predicated violence

¹⁰⁴ Mulcahy, *Hurricanes and Society*, pp.165-188.

between the enslaved and the white minority. This last point in particular resonates with the findings of this thesis; across the nineteenth century the impacts of hazards provoked almost no violence despite often subjecting the enslaved and later labouring population to further deprivation and longer working hours. Simon Smith, perhaps one of two historians to examine hazard impacts in the nineteenth century Caribbean, has also made note of this oddity.

Though only studying two of the same events this thesis examines, Simon Smith's work is crucial. Simon Smith has studied the eruption of *La Soufrière* in 1812 and the effects of the 1831 hurricane on St Vincent. In his analysis of the 1812 eruption of *La Soufrière*, Smith's focus is more on the economic impact of the 1812 eruption, whereas his examination of the impact of the 1831 hurricane on St Vincent is broader in scope. In his article on St Vincent, the comparison with Barbados is particularly useful. However, given the scope of his article it does not consider the effect on Barbados in detail; making this sort of comparison in greater detail is where this thesis will expand on Smith's work. What is more, this thesis will consider the change in British responses over time, a dimension Smith does not explore in his work. That said, in both cases Smith's analysis of the economic effects of these events are peerless and will be utilised by this thesis.

Whilst this work can expand on articles like Smith's because of their limited temporal scale it can also, through greater depth, expand on other works that have adopted a similar temporal scale such as Stuart Schwartz's *Sea of Storms*. For example, in the case of the Barbadian hurricane of 1831, Schwartz provides a useful examination of the hurricane's impact and the British response. However, given that his book is concerned with a far greater time scale and geographical scope, the wider comments he is able to make regarding British relief practices are inherently limited. He places greater focus on responses to events in the

Spanish Caribbean and American gulf and thus is unable to draw the connections between British responses that this thesis does.

Outside of differences in temporal and geographical scope, a key point of departure between this thesis and Schwartz's work is the position plantation agriculture assumes in the context of hazard impacts. One of the central arguments of this chapter is that this form of agriculture considerably enhanced the vulnerability of British Caribbean colonies to hurricanes. Arguing that Schwartz should have included this is not simply supplanting the approach of this thesis (specifically chapters two and three) onto his work. He purposely notes in the introduction to *Sea of Storms* that he accepts the position that disasters are not *natural* – in others words disasters are endogenous.¹⁰⁵ Natural phenomena exist, but disasters are created by the circumstance of the societies upon which a given phenomenon acts. In light of this, his failure to examine the links between plantation agriculture and the effects of hurricanes seems strange, particularly so because of the plantation's relevance not only to British examples but also to many of the other colonial societies considered in Schwartz's early nineteenth-century case studies. For instance, both Manuel Friginals in *Sugarmill* and Louis Perez in *Winds of Change* have demonstrated the deleterious effects that plantation agriculture and the wider colonial constructed environment had on Cuba's hurricane resilience, a country Schwartz also examines.¹⁰⁶ Whilst Schwartz fails to examine the linkages between the plantation, vulnerability and the hurricane, this thesis will highlight that linkage. Thus, this thesis will enhance not only our understanding of the wider effects of

¹⁰⁵ Stuart B. Schwartz, *Sea of Storms: A History of Hurricanes in the Greater Caribbean from Columbus to Katrina* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2015), p. xii.

¹⁰⁶ Manuel M. Friginals, *Sugarmill* (New York: NYU Press, 1976); Louis A. Pérez Jr, *Winds of Change: Hurricanes and the Transformation of Nineteenth-Century Cuba* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002).

plantation agriculture, but also add to the growing corpus of literature that makes the case for disasters as being inherently unnatural.

Overall, it can be seen that there has been very limited study of British responses to disaster in the nineteenth-century Caribbean. This thesis directly addresses that gap in the literature by examining not only British responses to disaster in the region but also what shaped them. This thesis conceives of disasters as endogenous phenomena and as such examines the extent to which the nineteenth-century Caribbean environment so shaped by colonial control exacerbated the effects of natural phenomena. Schwartz and also Smith's work accepts the proposition that disasters are not *natural*; Schwartz however fails to carry this through his analysis in his book and Smith has only examined disaster from this position in singular articles. Thus this thesis addresses the shortcomings of Schwartz's work and the limited temporality of Smith's, by directly analysing disaster as both an exogenous phenomena across the whole nineteenth century, showing how the interaction of the colonially shaped environment and natural phenomena changed overtime, and fills a distinct gap in this area of research.

2 - Exhuming vulnerability in the nineteenth and early twentieth-century British Caribbean environment.

The introduction to this thesis has already defined the concept of vulnerability and argued for its relevance and importance to environmental history. However, because this chapter's analysis is centred on that concept, for clarity's sake it is worth restating the two approaches to vulnerability this thesis draws from. First, the UN's International Strategy for Disaster Reduction:

Vulnerability is defined as the potential for loss (human, physical, economic, natural, or social) due to a hazardous event. It is the characteristics and circumstances of a community, system or asset that make it susceptible to the damaging effects of a hazard.¹⁰⁷

And Blaikie *et al's* definition:

'The characteristics of a person or group and their situation that influence their capacity to anticipate, cope with, resist and *recover from the impact of a natural hazard*'.¹⁰⁸ (My emphasis)

This chapter primarily considers the human and economic losses sustained by those who lived in the British Caribbean colonies (the community as per the UN definition). However, for the purposes of setting up the investigation into relief responses it is crucial to also incorporate Blaikie *et al's* definition. This definition goes beyond the UN definition's temporal focus on hazard impact, taking a longer view that allows for consideration of how hazard vulnerability can shape relief responses: the central point of study for this thesis.

¹⁰⁷ United Nations International Strategy for Disaster Reduction, *UNISDR terminology on disaster risk reduction* (Geneva, 2009).

¹⁰⁸ Blaikie *et al*, *At Risk: Natural Hazards, People's Vulnerability and Disasters*, p. 11.

Using these definitions together, this chapter examines how the shape of British colonial society affected the potential for loss from hazards and the rate of disaster recovery. To address this, this chapter is separated into two sections. The sections of this chapter reflect the central ways in which nineteenth and early twentieth-century British Caribbean rule exacerbated the potential for loss and made it harder to recover from the impacts of the three hazards considered in this thesis (hurricane, earthquake and eruption). The first four sections examine how the plantation engendered a number of deleterious effects that, particularly in the face of hurricanes, significantly increased the loss of human life and economic damage whilst also increasing the potential for epiphenomenal hazards. The last two sections examine how the British Caribbean's built environment created hazard vulnerability. Specifically, it focuses on architecture and the layouts of urban centres in which there was limited adaptation to hazards. In fact, British construction styles brought with them the hazards inherent to old-world urban centres, namely fire, which in turn further enhanced vulnerability to earthquakes in particular.

Exhuming the vulnerability created by British colonialism in the region is crucial to this thesis for a number of reasons. The vulnerabilities engendered by the configuration of British rule created epiphenomenal hazards that had a significant effect on how nature-induced disasters were responded to. Sugar plantations across the British Caribbean marginalised other crops creating precariousness in the food supply. Hurricane winds often uprooted what small numbers of crops were set aside for subsistence thus increasing the risk of famine. Food shortages then often became a flashpoint for the deterioration of already limited societal co-operation. Following a hurricane in 1831, enslaved peoples were shot and threatened with punishment for stockpiling what meagre food they could scavenge. This is far from the only example of such moments of tension, but it demonstrates the linkages between vulnerability and what crises the British had to respond to following nature induced disasters.

On a deeper level, together with chapter three that examines resilience and adaptation (or the lack thereof), an examination of the environment is crucial to understanding how British colonialism related to the regional environment and its hazards. After all, is it not axiomatic that how a society (or those who control it) treats its environment reflects the principles that guide it?

What emerges from this chapter is a sense that British adaptation to the Caribbean environment was very ad-hoc and unevenly deployed. Even when effective methods for resisting certain hazards were employed, they were rarely wholesale adopted. This attitude meant little effort was invested in making society less vulnerable: the Caribbean was after all only ever conceived as Britain's 'sugar bowl'.¹⁰⁹ As this thesis will show in following chapters, this line of thinking informed an approach to governance that meant that relief responses to disaster rarely extended beyond patching over the cracks and compensating and loaning money to those with financial interests in the region with the aim of restarting the process of wealth extraction as soon as possible. The aim was never to develop or to build back better. Understanding this relationship with the Caribbean environment and its hazards is crucial to understanding the thought processes underpinning both short- and long-term relief responses.

An exploration of the configuration of British rule in the Caribbean and how that made its colonies more vulnerable to losses in the wake of disaster is overdue. In contemporary literature that examines disaster relief it is accepted that understanding what creates vulnerability in a region, city or even a town to a certain hazard is crucial to creating effective relief responses.¹¹⁰ Thus a broad understanding of British Caribbean vulnerability is

¹⁰⁹ Catherine Hall, 'What is a West Indian?', in *West Indian Intellectuals in Britain*, ed. by Bill Schwarz (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2003), p. 36.

¹¹⁰ Mihir R. Bhatt, Tommy Reynolds, 'Community-Based Disaster Risk Reduction: Realizing the Primacy of Community', in *Disaster Risk and Vulnerability: Mitigation through Mobilizing Communities and Partnerships*, ed. by C. Emded Haque and David Etkin (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press), p. 74.

integral to examining disaster response in the region. Understanding the vulnerabilities in the environment allows us to understand to some degree how effective British relief truly was, what was responded to and what it left unchanged.

There have been only isolated studies of British colonial disaster response in the Caribbean. When it comes to work that specifically employs the concepts of vulnerability and resilience (as chapter three will) to ground an examination of relief that number becomes smaller. As the literature review chapter has already noted Schwartz appears to take a critical approach; in *Sea of Storms*, he sets out his acceptance of the position that disasters are not inherently natural.¹¹¹ However, throughout the book, he fails to use this foundation to meaningfully engage with any analysis of how disaster was created and worsened by the configuration of British rule.

The absence of analysis from a perspective that sees disasters as endogenous events is particularly notable when it comes to Schwartz's examination of the 1831 Barbadian hurricane where he does not consider the damage it did to the environment. As this chapter will show, the damage exhibited on Barbados post-hurricane was severe, particularly in terms of the damage it did to the environment; landslides and other wide-scale deformations of the island's terrain stand out in the historical record.

There are only two scholars who have examined British colonial disaster response in the nineteenth century and grounded it in an environmental perspective utilising concepts of vulnerability and resilience: Alexander Berland and Simon Smith. Berland, in his PhD thesis *Extreme weather and social vulnerability in colonial Antigua*, provides an extremely informative assessment of the impacts of droughts on Antigua.¹¹² Centrally, Berland argues that the level of vulnerability experienced by societal groupings in Antigua reflected the

¹¹¹ Schwartz, *Sea of Storms*, p. xii.

¹¹² Berland, 'Extreme weather and social vulnerability in colonial Antigua'.

patterns of inequality inherent in the racialised hierarchy enforced by colonialism. However, Berland is a historical geographer and as such the focus of his work leans towards climate reconstruction and societal coping mechanisms and less a consideration of how relief was constructed within the schema of the British Empire. What is more, Berland's thesis focuses exclusively on Antigua and the hazards he chooses to focus on differ from those considered in this thesis; he examines drought (which this thesis does not) whilst excluding from his analysis events this thesis does investigate such as the 1843 earthquake.

By contrast, instead of focusing on a single colony, this thesis takes a comparative approach to draw out the similarities in British colonial responses across parts of the Caribbean. As Simon Smith's work has been examined in the earlier literature review, it is only necessary to restate that this chapter will draw on his work, but will also go further than Smith by employing a comparative approach over a longer time period. Overall, this chapter shows that of all the areas in which potential for loss was exacerbated, economic loss stands as the clear leader with potential for human loss following second. This chapter shows that British colonial profit-making infrastructure was frequently devastated by nature-induced disasters. In direct consequence of this, chapters four and five show that, motivated by economic imperatives, the desire to quickly rebuild these was nearly always a central shaper of British responses to disaster.

2.1 Plantations in British Caribbean history

Though British colonialism in the Caribbean did not begin with the plantation, an economic imperative was the central motivator behind the financing of the voyages of the first British colonisers to the Caribbean. That said, after a failure to successfully grow the traditional cash crops of the British new world colonies (cotton and tobacco) the sugar plantation (and

enslaved peoples to work it) soon emerged as the definitive method by which wealth was extracted from the Caribbean colonies. The plantation became the centre of British Caribbean life. Its rhythms dictated the rhythms of people's lives: the enslaved, the overseers and the colonial officials. As Tobias Doring puts it, 'the plantation has been the arena for the social, cultural and natural reconstruction of Caribbean space under colonial governance...any discussion of landscape in Caribbean discourse must therefore centralize the plantation as a key framing reality'.¹¹³ Doring's point is certainly true for the eighteenth century and early nineteenth century. Following the emancipation of the enslaved peoples of the Caribbean in 1834 and the ending of schemes of apprenticeship in 1838, the labour relations between the plantation owners and overseers and the now labouring classes underwent important shifts as the latter gained notional freedom. That said, although labour relations may have changed, for British interests the plantation remained the primary manner by which wealth was extracted from its colonies into the early twentieth century. Over the nineteenth century, the plantation remained the nexus of British Caribbean rule and as such a study of the vulnerabilities it engendered is crucial to understanding colonial relief practices.

Constructing a global taxonomy for plantation agriculture has proved historically difficult.¹¹⁴ Generally speaking however, plantations can be conceived as an intensive form of farming that (usually) focuses on a single cash crop usually produced for export. This general definition is definitely applicable to the agricultural organisation of the nineteenth-century British-controlled Caribbean. Though coffee played the role of the central cash crop on Dominica and was important on other colonies such as Jamaica, sugar was the crop at the heart of British plantations in the Caribbean.

¹¹³ Amar Wahab, *Colonial Inventions: Landscape, Power and Representation in Nineteenth-Century Trinidad* (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2010), p. 51.

¹¹⁴ P.P. Courtenay, *Plantation Agriculture*, rev. edn (London: Belly & Hyman, 1980), p. 10.

As the plantation became the primary method of extracting wealth from the region it expanded rapidly throughout the colonies forcing monumental environmental change on the region. Sugar is not a plant that grows naturally in the Caribbean; it was brought to the region by the Dutch. Growing it requires open, level land and consequently the creation of plantations throughout the British Caribbean began a process of land clearance and deforestation. Historical geographers such as Richardson have examined the devastation that plantation agriculture wrought upon the Caribbean environment.¹¹⁵ However, the implications of these changes in the context of nature-induced hazards have been little examined.

2.2 Deforestation and soil erosion

The Caribbean islands in their natural state were heavily forested with tropical trees and vegetation. Gaining access to the flat land and rich soils sequestered by the tropical vegetation necessitated large clearance and deforestation. However, the geography of the individual islands limited the uniformity and scale of this transformation. Of all of the British Caribbean colonies that underwent these large-scale environmental changes, Barbados endured the most extreme versions of the processes of clearance and deforestation. In contrast to islands such as Jamaica and Dominica, which have mountainous regions, Barbados was largely flat and easily denuded of the majority of its trees and other vegetation. By the beginning of the eighteenth century, Barbados was, as B.W. Higman puts it, a single 'vast sugar plantation'.¹¹⁶ Contrastingly, parts of Dominica remained heavily forested and even

¹¹⁵ Bonham C. Richardson, *The Caribbean in the Wider World, 1492-1992: A Regional Geography* (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 1992).

¹¹⁶ B. W. Higman, *Slave Populations of the British Caribbean, 1807-1834* (Kingston: University of the West Indies Press, 1995), p. 52.

unexplored by British colonists as late as 1837.¹¹⁷ The differences in the scale of transformations across the British colonies are important to note as the difference acts as a point of comparison by which we are able, to some degree, to isolate the way in which the plantation enhanced in particular hurricane vulnerability.

As it does today throughout the world, large-scale deforestation gives rise to two key problems. The first that usually manifests itself is soil erosion. Trees and their roots play a key role in binding the earth together. Without them soil loses its cohesion and crucially, in periods of heavy rain, can be washed away entirely. That the problem of soil erosion was endemic in the eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Caribbean was noted by Eric Williams as part of his decline thesis advanced in *Capitalism and Slavery*. It remains one of the less-contested parts of his argument given that soil erosion remains to this day a significant and very visible issue in heavily deforested parts of the world.¹¹⁸

The natural follow-on from soil erosion is a cumulative loss of soil fertility. When soil is without cohesion and easily washed away, so are its nutrients. In the Caribbean context, loss of soil fertility was compounded by the fact that the region's soils were already comparatively nutrient poor and their fertility more dependent on the availability of trees and other vegetation for nutrient recycling.¹¹⁹ Trees feed the soil directly and indirectly: directly through plant litter and nutrient recycling processes, and indirectly by encouraging biodiversity, providing habitats for animals who themselves feed the soil through the course of their life span.

¹¹⁷ Joseph Sturge, *The West Indies in 1837: Being the journal of a visit to Antigua, Montserrat, Dominica, St Lucia, Barbados, and Jamaica; undertaken for the purpose of ascertaining the actual condition of the negro population of those islands* (London: Hamilton, Adams & co, 1838), p. 96.

¹¹⁸ Eric Williams, *Capitalism and Slavery* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1944), p. 113.

¹¹⁹ Elizabeth DeLoughrey, 'Yam, Roots, and Rot: Allegories of the Provision Grounds', *Small Axe*, 15.1 (2011), p. 74.

Specifically in the case of nineteenth-century British Caribbean plantation agriculture, this cumulative loss of nutrients was compounded by the Plantocracy's drive for profit. Planters were notorious for their levels of indebtedness and, as a consequence of these complex webs of financial obligations, strived to maximise the outputs of their plantations. Thus, the nutrient capacity of the soils was extremely stretched. On Barbados (again the extreme of Caribbean environmental transformations), this complex set of interlinking problems was particularly apparent.

Writing in 1750, only a century on from Barbados' initial colonisation, Hughes noted that around the plantations soil erosion created 'barren, rocky gullies runaway land, waste land, worn out, not fertile [sic]'.¹²⁰ The effect of this frequent washing away added to curative overuse meant that by the middle of the eighteenth century the island's soils were largely exhausted.¹²¹ By the nineteenth century, the lack of fertility in Barbados' soil was such that Richard Madden observed that were it not for the use of a variety of seaweed called 'varek' as fertiliser, there would be no growth at all on the island.¹²² He even noted that there had even been desperate and unsuccessful attempts to bring soil to Barbados from Dutch Guiana, a region which, crucially, had suffered considerably less deforestation.¹²³

2.3 The coaction of deforestation and soil erosion

It is in accounts of the Barbadian hurricane of 1831 that the role of the plantation in enhancing the island's vulnerability is particularly clear. The hurricane of 1831 was without

¹²⁰ Griffith Hughes, *The Natural History of Barbados In Ten Books* (London: Printed for the author, 1750), pp. 20–22.

¹²¹ Higman, *Slave Populations of the British Caribbean*, p. 52.

¹²² Richard Robert Madden, *A Twelvemonth's Residence in the West Indies*, p. 35.

¹²³ *Ibid.*, p. 35;

Robert Montgomery Martin, *History of the West Indies: Comprising Jamaica, Honduras, Trinidad, Tobago, Grenada, The Bahamas and the Virgin Islands* (London: Whittaker, 1836), p. 31

doubt one of the fiercest to hit the island of Barbados. However, accounts of the immediate damage caused by the hurricane are the first insight into the fact that there was more at play than simply a hurricane hitting an island. The anonymous *Account of the Fatal Hurricane* records a multitude of first-hand experiences from 1831 and as such provides unparalleled insight into the epiphenomenal effects of the hurricane. It begins with a chronologically structured narrative explanation of the effects of previous hurricanes to hit British colonies. Hurricanes are nearly always accompanied by significant rainfall. Rapid increases in rainfall can have destructive effects on any society, but what is striking in the *Account* is how plantation agriculture appears to have created epiphenomenal hazards with serious implications for the potential of loss; human, environmental and economic.

The author of the *Account* observes that in the cases of all hurricanes the increased rainfall often completely altered the land, as the soil was rent open by torrents of water.¹²⁴ In his history of Barbados, Robert Schomburgk similarly makes note that enormously destructive landslips were always common during periods of heavy rain.¹²⁵ Writing in the mid-eighteenth century, Griffith Hughes observed that where large amounts of sugar cane were planted, the soil ‘often runs away’ and expressed shock at the ‘violence at which the land moves’ during a period of heavy rain.¹²⁶ Hughes also recorded other examples where cane planted land came ‘tumbling down’ during extended rain.¹²⁷

¹²⁴ Editor of the ‘West Indian’, *Account of the Fatal Hurricane by Which Barbados Suffered in August 1831* (Barbados: Printed for Samuel Hyde, 1831), pp. 1–28.

¹²⁵ Sir Robert Hermann Schomburgk, *The History of Barbados: Comprising a Geographical and Statistical Description of the Island, a Sketch of the Historical Events Since the Settlement, and an Account of Its Geology and Natural Productions* (Frank Cass, 1848), pp. 67–68.

¹²⁶ Hughes, *The Natural History of Barbados In Ten Books*, pp. 20–22.

¹²⁷ *Ibid*, pp. 20–22.

The effects were severe enough that by the beginning of the eighteenth century, planters were forced to take active measures to prevent soil movement and erosion.¹²⁸ Yet, as eye-witness accounts from 1831 attest, soil erosion had worsened by the beginning of the nineteenth century as sugar production intensified on Barbados. In 1831 on the day after the hurricane, the author of the *Account* described the state of Barbados: ‘no sign of vegetation was apparent...the surface of the ground appeared as if fire had ran through the land’.¹²⁹ Other eye witnesses reported seeing the hurricane-borne deluge of rain opening huge chasms in the ground which swallowed their livestock.¹³⁰

The phenomenon of landslips that these accounts all note are not simply a natural part of the Caribbean environment, at least not on the scale noted in these sources. Indeed, Hughes discusses the phenomena of landslips on Barbados because he felt it would surprise those unacquainted with the island, the inference being that they were on such a scale he knew that his European readers would have little to compare them to. That such epiphenomenal hazards were frequent following hurricanes is testament to the plantation’s role in enhancing vulnerability. As the reporting of casualties was inaccurate it is hard to discern whether landslides and other deformations of the terrain had a direct effect on the loss human life. However, it is without doubt that they regularly increased economic losses and worsened the overall condition of the soil.

There are few records of notable hurricanes on Jamaica in the nineteenth century. However, what records there are, particularly from the accounts of visitors to the island, suggest that in the wake of hurricanes it also suffered similar epiphenomenal hazards as those experienced in 1831. Nancy Prince relates in her accounts of her travels in Jamaica that

¹²⁸ David Watts, *The West Indies: Patterns of Development, Culture and Environmental Change Since 1492* (Cambridge University Press, 1990), p. 397.

¹²⁹ Editor of the ‘West Indian’, *Account of the Fatal Hurricane*, p. 47.

¹³⁰ *Ibid*, p. 23.

heavy rains ran off the mountains bringing with them the ‘produce of the earth, large branches of trees’.¹³¹ Similarly, Robert Baird, a visitor to the island who had never observed one of these landslips still had knowledge of them – suggesting they had a level of notoriety outside the island.¹³² Indeed, when a hurricane struck Jamaica in 1815, accounts suggest that the run off of soil from the mountains was severe enough that rivers entirely filled with earth, whilst the ground on plantations ‘broke’ around buildings and ‘threatened to bury’ their inhabitants.¹³³ The linkages between the plantation and the weakening of soil cohesion become clear when many eyewitness accounts from 1815 note that the most severe movements of the soil took place directly on the sugar plantations.¹³⁴

The linkage between the plantation and these epiphenomenal hazards becomes especially clear when one examines how hurricanes affected islands with less expansive plantations. A hurricane that struck Dominica in 1834 gives us a case that works, albeit not perfectly, as an analogue by which to further illustrate the role that sugar plantations played in exacerbating vulnerability to hurricanes. Of the ways in which Dominica differed from Barbados in the 1830s, what is most crucial for the purposes of this chapter is their differing agricultural configurations. Where the land of Barbados was entirely given over to sugar plantations, Dominica differentiated and instead focused on coffee. Though the island did have sugar plantations, intensive monoculture was not pursued because the growth of cane on Dominica was considered problematic; Joseph Sturge reported that it grew too ‘rank and luxuriantly for the full secretion and maturation of its saccharine juices, so that it is less productive than in the dry, exhausted soils of Antigua and Barbados’.¹³⁵

¹³¹ Nancy Prince, *The West Indies: Being a description of the islands, progress of Christianity, education and liberty among the colored population generally* (Boston: Dow & Jackson, 1841), p. 4.

¹³² Robert Baird, *Impressions and experiences of the West Indies and North America in 1849* (Philadelphia: Lea & Blanchard, 1850), p. 86.

¹³³ ‘The Late Hurricane in Jamaica: with reflections’, *Baptist Magazine*, 31 October, 1815, p. 106.

¹³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 106.

¹³⁵ Sturge, *The West Indies in 1837*, p. 96.

Though the growth of coffee production on Dominica occasioned some level of deforestation, coffee trees themselves mitigated some of the problems such as soil cohesion so associated with sugar. In contrast to sugar cane, coffee trees have roots that can extend up to three metres into the soil, meaning that it binds it far better than sugar.¹³⁶ Such are the strength of these roots that the tree is also considerably hardier in the face of hurricane winds. On a tour of Jamaica in 1837, James Thome and Joseph Kimball noted with surprise that following the hurricane that hit the island in 1812, coffee production increased whilst sugar production decreased as the former did not suffer from the ‘effects of a storm’.¹³⁷

It is in this context that we can understand why in 1834, in direct contrast to 1831 there was an absence of landslips in the aftermath of the Dominican hurricane. For lack of scientific records, it is true that there is no empirical measure by which to compare the relative strengths of the Barbadian and Dominican hurricanes. However, survivor accounts do suggest that they had a comparative level of strength not least because of the level of destruction wrought on plantations and public buildings. Across the island of Dominica following the hurricane of 1834, as was similarly the case in 1831, public buildings and private property were completely levelled and whole sugar works destroyed. Reverend George Clarke, rector of St George’s church in Roseau, relayed that there had been near total destruction of ‘dwellings, negro huts [and] buildings’ (the distinction between these three is important as it shows that stone buildings, both single level and multilevel, along with simple huts were all knocked down).¹³⁸ Similarly, plantation owner D.L. Laidlaw wrote that stone buildings like his across the island were entirely ruined and that he had to rescue his brother

¹³⁶ Bruce Schaffer and Peter C. Andersen, *Handbook of Environmental Physiology of Fruit Crops* (Boca Raton: CRC Press, 1994), p. 103.

¹³⁷ James Armstrong Thome, Joseph Horace Kimball, *Emancipation in the West Indies: A six months' tour in Antigua, Barbadoes, and Jamaica in the year 1837* (Philadelphia: the American Anti-Slavery Society, 1838), pp. 119-120.

¹³⁸ TNA, T1/4397 Long Papers, bundle 852, part 3: West Indies relief, Extract of a letter sent by Rev George Clarke to (recipient not given), Dominica, 20 September, 1834.

from the ruins of the 'great house'.¹³⁹ Furthermore, other accounts suggest that the hurricane was strong enough to drive entire villages into the sea, but it was rocks that blocked the roads, not landslides.¹⁴⁰

Like in 1831, a great amount of rain fell on Dominica. Again, it is impossible to make an empirical comparison between the rainfall levels in 1831 and 1834, but eyewitness accounts from 1834 show that it was certainly not insubstantial. A Mr L.A. Loubiure relates that the estate of a Mr Courche was entirely washed away by a river swollen by rains.¹⁴¹ Indeed, the 27 September issue of the *Dominica Colonist* reflected on the fact that in the weeks prior to the hurricane the island had been subject to frequent bouts of heavy rain. Even if the hurricane itself brought little rain (though the swelling of rivers would suggest otherwise), it is clear that the ground of the island was far from dry.¹⁴² Where we are therefore able to see some similarities in the strengths of the hurricanes in 1831 and 1834, there are also some important differences that strengthen the argument for sugar plantations as a factor both exacerbating vulnerability to hurricanes and generating epiphenomenal hazards.

Though as mentioned Dominica's central cash crop was coffee, the island did still have sugar plantations. The question is then why is there no record of significant landslips or otherwise significant movements in the soil surface? The answer arguably lies in the level of forest still present in Dominica in this period. In an important contrast to Barbados and the scale of its sugar plantations, on Dominica it is the plantations themselves that are marginalised. Coffee plantations for instance were often planted in rocky ravines and in 1834

¹³⁹ TNA, T1/4397, D.L. Laidlaw to Thomas Gregg, Dominica, 2 October, 1834.

¹⁴⁰ TNA, CO 71/78 (Dominica) Correspondence, Original-Secretary of State: Despatches; Offices and Individuals, J. Colquhoun to Spring Rice, 12 November, 1834.

¹⁴¹ TNA, T1/4397, L.A. Loubiure to M.L. Welch, Dominica, 1 October, 1834.

¹⁴² TNA, T1/4397, extract of the *Dominica Colonist*, 27 September, 1834.

they seem to have survived the hurricane because of this.¹⁴³ Planter J. Colquhoun mentions that throughout Dominica there are many patches of ‘uncultivable woodland’ something otherwise non-existent on Barbados.¹⁴⁴ Dominica was always the most forested of the islands under British Caribbean control and those visiting it often commented on the density of its tree cover and vegetation.¹⁴⁵ In *A Winter in the West Indies*, Joseph Gurney described Dominica as a ‘moist island...of luxuriant fertility; and nine tenths of the soil, productive as it is by nature, are wholly unoccupied – in a state of absolute wilderness’.¹⁴⁶

Consequently, where the evidence of severe changes in the soil are clear from *The Account*, it is notable that nothing of a comparable nature appears in the reports coming from Dominica in 1834. What makes this more striking is that unlike in 1831 where there is only one single detailed eyewitness record, *The Account*, in the case of 1834 there are multiple accounts that were sent to London in an attempt to boost the chance of securing Parliamentary assistance.¹⁴⁷

In the cases of the two other notably strong hurricanes of the nineteenth century, there are marked contrasts between the damage suffered by the forested and denuded islands of the Caribbean. For example, in 1847, Tobago suffered a rare hurricane and yet, the island’s forests survived.¹⁴⁸ In 1898, a particularly strong hurricane hit Barbados, St Vincent and St Lucia. Rainfall on St Vincent, in the Soufriere area where there had been extensive deforestation to collect logwood for export, seems to have triggered big landslides.¹⁴⁹ It is

¹⁴³ TNA, T1/4397, Colquhoun letter addressed to St. James’s Place, 7 April, 1835.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid.

¹⁴⁵ Andreas Malm, ‘The Final Conquest: Hurricane Maria as the latest battle in a 500 year war’, *Jacobin*, <<https://www.jacobinmag.com/2017/09/hurricane-maria-dominica-climate-change>>, [16/11/17].

¹⁴⁶ Joseph John Gurney, *A winter in the West Indies, described in familiar letters to Henry Clay of Kentucky* (London: J. Murray, 1840), p. 72.

¹⁴⁷ TNA, T1/4397, Letter written by Colquhoun sent to Rice compiles evidence of losses given by Dominican planters, 13 November, 1834.

¹⁴⁸ SOAS, CWM/LMS/West Indies/Incoming correspondence. Tobago/Box 1, Extracts from Published accounts of the Tobago Hurricane of 1847.

¹⁴⁹ Bonham C. Richardson, *Economy and Environment in the Caribbean : Barbados and the Windwards in the Late 1800s* (Kingston: University of West Indies Press, 1997), p. 180; *Parliamentary Papers* (1898), House of

worth noting that later in 1901 parts of the Scotland district of Barbados were subjected to heavy rains and significant landslips followed.¹⁵⁰

It is clear that to some degree the heavy deforestation wrought on the Caribbean by plantation agriculture exacerbated the potential of hurricanes to cause epiphenomenal hazards such as landslips that, particularly in the case of Barbados in 1831, led to greater economic, environmental and human losses. Barbadian planters estimated that the island suffered £2,311,729 in economic losses and that 1787 people died as a result of the hurricane, the highest proportion of which were enslaved peoples.¹⁵¹ By contrast, on Dominica only 29 people were believed to have died and the island's planters did not even submit an estimate of their losses to the Colonial Office.¹⁵² Given that, as chapter five will show, planters were often wont to overestimate their losses to try and elicit greater amounts of money from Parliament, the actions of the Dominican planters appear striking. It is possible that the island's planters felt that, comparative to the Barbadian hurricane of 1831, which they cited as precedent in their requests for relief, Dominica had sustained limited damage and it was better to avoid colouring Parliament's eventual decision.¹⁵³

In a contemporary context, these links between deforestation and increased hurricane vulnerability are clear and still threaten the Caribbean region.¹⁵⁴ At least in the case of 1831, deforestation also had a very immediate effect in that without the natural shelter provided by

Commons [C.9205], West Indies. Correspondence relating to the hurricane on 10th-12th, 1898, and the relief of the distress caused thereby, p. 2, Governor Moloney to Secretary of State, 15 September, 1898.

¹⁵⁰ *Barbados Advocate*, 4 October, 1901.

¹⁵¹ TNA, CO 31/51 (Barbados) Sessional Papers. Assembly, 20 December, 1831.

¹⁵² TNA, CO 71/78, J. Colquhoun, colonial agent to Earl of Aberdeen, 1 October, 1834.

¹⁵³ TNA, CO 71/78, Colquhoun to Rice, 12 November, 1834.

¹⁵⁴ Steve Zwick, 'How Agroforestry Can Shield Haiti From the Next Hurricane', *Huffington Post*, 4 October, 2016, <https://www.huffingtonpost.com/steve-zwick/deforestation-leaves-hait_b_12335108.html>, [20/11/2017].

forest cover many Barbadians had no recourse but to run to open ground and suffer through the night. In consequence of this many were killed by flying debris.¹⁵⁵

While the effects of deforestation on hurricane vulnerability differed across the islands of the British Caribbean, one area in which it had a near uniform effect is on the availability of timber. Timber was an essential material for the construction of any shelter, and yet attempts to conserve it appear few and far between; post-disaster shortages left people exposed for longer and prolonged recovery in many cases. Taking the example of the 1831 hurricane again; the need for timber was great. Nearly all of the homes on Barbados lay completely devastated, as did its entire sugar manufactory. What is more, wood was the primary fuel for not only people's homes, but also for all of the boiling houses. Trees were essential not only for holding the soils of the islands together, but also for their society and their economy. Yet, a lack of conservation meant that Barbados for example was entirely reliant on imported timber. This reliance on imported timber had been established since the middle of the eighteenth century and yet by 1831 nothing had changed. In fact, the reserves of timber on Tobago had only shrunk, something which also demonstrates the destructive effects the insatiable drive for profit had on the Caribbean environment.¹⁵⁶

Recurrent in nearly all of the records of colonial responses to the hurricanes of the nineteenth century is the need to import timber and other building materials to British Caribbean islands. Crucially however, even on islands where deforestation was not as big an issue as on Barbados, the need to import timber was a frequent occurrence because of the predominance of plantation agriculture. In the case of other hazards such as earthquakes, the extremely depleted resources of the colonies still had an effect on recovery. In 1843,

¹⁵⁵ Editor of the 'West Indian', *Account of the Fatal Hurricane*, pp. 51–52.

¹⁵⁶ Mimi Sheller, *Consuming the Caribbean: From Arawaks to Zombies: From Arwaks to Zombies* (New York: Routledge, 2003), p. 45.

following an earthquake on Antigua (an island that much like Barbados was heavily deforested) there was a need to import timber. In 1907, there were also requests to begin the import of materials to Kingston to begin rebuilding, though arguably less because of the island's own marginalised resources and more to do with the fact that by 1907 Kingston to some degree represented a modern city of that period.

Even on islands with ample supplies of timber such as Dominica, the centrality of the plantation undermined any potential for self-sufficiency. On a visit to the island in 1837, Joseph Sturge noted that 'The island imports great quantities of timber, and numbers of cattle and horses, though valuable trees grow on every estate...if it be asked, why man does not put forth his hand and gather the good things which nature provides with such spontaneous bounty, the reply is, that there is no surplus labor to devote to such minor matters; the sugar and coffee cultivation absorb all the resources of the island'.¹⁵⁷

Arguably, the effect the plantation had on the resource base of colonies was moderated to some degree in the post-emancipation era. Tobago, like Dominica, was one of the more heavily forested of the British Caribbean colonies (established in 1776, it has the oldest protected forest reserves in the region). Consequently, in 1847, without slavery or the apprenticeship system directing the energies of the African-Caribbean population entirely to the plantations, following the major hurricane of that year there were no requests for lumber or shingles to be imported. That said, great value was evidently still attached to construction materials as in the week following the hurricane a law was passed specifically to allow the flogging of those caught stealing them.¹⁵⁸ Tobago in 1847 however appears to be an outlier. Little changed over the nineteenth century on those islands that had been most severely

¹⁵⁷ Sturge, *The West Indies in 1837*, p.98.

¹⁵⁸ *Tobago Hurricane of 1847: Papers relative to the Hurricane in Tobago Presented to Both Houses of Parliament by Command of Her Majesty Queen Victoria, on April 11, 1848*. Historical Documents of Trinidad and Tobago No.3, W. Reid to Earl Grey, 20 November, 1847.

deforested. Following the hurricane in 1898 timber imports were deemed essential to begin rebuilding Barbados and St Vincent.¹⁵⁹ So slow was the arrival of these imports that they had to be carefully rationed, something which in turn greatly slowed both islands' recovery.

2.4 Food insecurity

Of all of the environmental changes wrought by the expansion of plantations in the Caribbean, the one that most threatened to increase the loss of life was food insecurity. As has been shown, the expansion of plantation agriculture set in motion a process that robbed the soils of their fertility, but their expansion also marginalised the production of crops grown to meet the needs of the enslaved peoples (later labouring classes), plantation operatives and colonial officials. Even outside the moment of disaster, this marginalisation frequently led to what Higman terms 'seasonal stress' and was colloquially known as the 'hungry or hard-time[s]'; food shortages that inevitably were felt keenest by those in the lowest stations of society.¹⁶⁰

Land was wholesale turned over to the plantation, and hurricanes often destroyed what few crops were otherwise allowed to be grown for subsistence. This vulnerability to serious shortfalls in food meant that, as was the case with timber, provisions frequently had to be imported post-disaster. Even on the larger islands like Jamaica where hurricanes rarely swept the whole island, this precariousness was still present. As William Gardiner notes in his history of Jamaica, 'a storm [on 12 October 1812] did great damage to houses, and destroyed immense quantities of growing provisions, a calamity more serious on account of the war with the United States preventing importations from that quarter'.¹⁶¹ In that same

¹⁵⁹ *PP*, HoC [C.9205], West Indies. Correspondence, p. 7, Moloney to Chamberlin, 25 September, 1898.

¹⁶⁰ Higman, *Slave Populations of the British Caribbean*, p. 214.

¹⁶¹ William James Gardner, *A History of Jamaica from Its Discovery by Christopher Columbus to the Present Time* (London: Elliot Stock, 1873), p. 249.

year the destruction occasioned by the eruption of *La Soufrière* on St Vincent also threatened starvation for two reasons. The constant drive for expansion onto fertile lands meant that a large portion of the islands plantations were grouped around the base of the volcano; they were almost entirely destroyed when it erupted. Second, no dry provisions had been stockpiled on the island; perhaps because it had not erupted since 1718, the threat from the volcano was underestimated.¹⁶² This idea that the threat of the volcano was underestimated is borne out by the fact that it was considered by planters as an attractive place to settle because it was more fertile, had better facilities for shipping and was actually considered less risky than the eastern coast.¹⁶³ It was only reciprocity in the form of provisions from neighbouring Barbados that appears to have meant that in 1812, starvation was avoided on St Vincent.

As the examples of Jamaica and St Vincent show, lack of subsistence crops could easily be further worsened by failures in the supply chain. Similarly, since the ‘great’ hurricane of 1780, Barbados had become reliant on imported food and despite the colonial authorities acknowledging this, the destruction of subsistence crops in 1831 still precipitated the need to import rations.¹⁶⁴ As chapter four, which addresses short-term responses to disaster, will show, when the threat of famine loomed, the potential for civil unrest increased and had significant role in redirecting the energies of both colonial administrators and the Plantocracy away from addressing immediate relief the aftermath of disaster.

As Sturge showed on his visit to Dominica, the plantation marginalised the space and energy directed towards growing subsistence crops, but the long-range effects of deforestation also played a role in the need to import food. In the case of Barbados, Guinea

¹⁶² *London Gazette*, 2 May, 1812.

¹⁶³ Martin, *History of the West Indies*, p.227.

¹⁶⁴ Richard B. Sheridan, ‘Strategies of Slave Subsistence: The Jamaican Case’, in *From Chattel Slaves to Wage Slaves: The Dynamics of Labour Bargaining in the Americas*, ed. by Mary Turner (Kingston: Ian Randle Publishers, 1995), p. 64.

corn was the key source of rations for enslaved peoples.¹⁶⁵ Sourcing the majority of the food for such a large proportion of island's population from a single source was a precarious arrangement in itself, but guinea corn brought its own issues that only compounded this vulnerability. Guinea corn was, in comparison to root vegetables, easily swept away during hurricanes. Indeed, in the wake of the 1831 hurricane, nearly all the fields of Guinea corn were entirely destroyed.¹⁶⁶

The enslaved population was given small allotments, but for the most part what was grown on this land was sold as a cash crop for the export market.¹⁶⁷ This was not just the case in Barbados but in Dominica too. Henry Coleridge notes the desire to achieve economic agency outside of coerced labour (in this case the apprenticeship system). Coleridge relays that 'all the money which the negroes acquire, is earned by taking the surplus products of their grounds to Roseau, and other markets...of their privilege of attending market they are so jealous'.¹⁶⁸

What is more, these plots only provided a 'fraction' of the average diet.¹⁶⁹ Given their lower priority on the already stretched land, the rations for the enslaved population were not drawn from diverse sources. Barbados as 'one vast plantation' elected to focus slave labour on the cultivation of sugar and thus away from personal cultivation, leading again to the necessity of food imports. It is true that with the ending of the slave trade in 1807, as the value of the already enslaved population in the Caribbean rose, Barbadian planters did allow more personal cultivation in attempt to secure the health of their slaves.¹⁷⁰ However, Kenneth

¹⁶⁵ Kenneth F. Kiple, *The Caribbean Slave: A Biological History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), p. 69.

¹⁶⁶ Editor of the 'West Indian', *Account of the Fatal Hurricane*, p. 103.

¹⁶⁷ Higman, *Slave Populations of the British Caribbean*, p. 207.

¹⁶⁸ Henry Nelson Coleridge, *Six Months in the West Indies, in 1825* (London: J. Murray, 1826), p. 101.

¹⁶⁹ Sheridan, 'Strategies of Slave Subsistence: The Jamaican Case', p. 64.

¹⁷⁰ James Stephen, *The Slavery of the British West India Colonies Delineated: As It Exists Both in Law and Practice, and Compared with the Slavery of Other Countries, Ancient and Modern* (London: J. Butterworth & Son, 1824), p. 261–262.

Kiple argues that, as it was the enslaved population's responsibility to tend these provisions, it became another source of enforced work for them and consequently, they did it indifferently. Kiple's view that the enslaved tended their plots 'indifferently' has been indirectly challenged in more recent years by scholars who have shown the cultural and economic value attached to this land by enslaved peoples.¹⁷¹ However, it remains true that there was often conflict between the plantation owners and slaves over what they should plant. The enslaved peoples preferred to plant plantains, corn and other above-ground crops at risk of wind damage instead of yams, etc.¹⁷²

The lack of food in these post-disaster moments had a significant impact on the immediate responses of the colonial authorities, as chapter four will show. The destruction of the allotments of the enslaved was a factor stressed repeatedly in nearly every letter forwarded to London asking for pecuniary relief. By contrast, in the post-slavery and apprenticeship period the condition of the now free population rarely features. The correspondence leaving Tobago following the hurricane in 1847 is indicative of this change. First and foremost, the 'threat of famine' or words to that effect are conspicuous in their absence. Secondly, little mention is made of the provisions grounds of the now free labourers. Tellingly, it is noted that the crop of yams is largely unharmed, perhaps suggesting that given more time, space and the ability to generate income without selling their provisions, the free peoples of the Caribbean grew crops more resilient to hurricanes.¹⁷³ At the end of the nineteenth century, and in contrast Tobago, on the island which had long been the major sugar producers, the labour forces of Barbados, St Vincent and St Lucia were still directed towards 'maximising...production'.¹⁷⁴ In 1898 on the smaller islands of St Vincent and St

¹⁷¹ DeLoughrey, 'Yam, Roots, and Rot', pp. 58-75.

¹⁷² Kiple, *The Caribbean Slave*, pp. 67-68.

¹⁷³ Historical Documents of Trinidad and Tobago No.3, 'Summary of the Damage done to the Sugar Estates of this Island by the Storm of the 11th October, 1847', p. 7.

¹⁷⁴ Bonham C. Richardson, *Economy and Environment in the Caribbean*, p. 144.

Lucia colonial officials insisted that food needed to be imported.¹⁷⁵ Such a course of action also had to be followed after the 1902 eruption of *La Soufrière* where it appears that, not having learnt the lessons of the 1812 eruption, many plantations that remained clustered around the base of the volcano were destroyed.¹⁷⁶

It is clear that when it came to creating precariousness in the food supply of British Caribbean colonies, the plantation as a mode of production was the problem, and not necessarily the crop it grew. The Bahamas had never been a sugar-producing colony; instead, its cash crop in the nineteenth century was cotton. In the wake of a hurricane in 1866, food was extremely limited and those with the power to import gained a huge advantage as the colonial government found themselves in the position of having to purchase provisions from merchants who quickly raised their prices.¹⁷⁷ Even the larger British colonies like Jamaica were not able to sustain themselves in the face of hurricanes because of the way in which the plantation system marginalised subsistence crops. In 1903, the only severe hurricane suffered by Jamaica in the period covered by this thesis destroyed a large portion of the island's export and subsistence crops and left it again reliant on American provisions to avert starvation.¹⁷⁸

This chapter has so far shown that particularly in the case of hurricanes, the plantation had a significant role in increasing the risk of epiphenomenal hazards such as landslides which threatened greater economic and human losses. The plantation also placed greater pressure on the resource base of many colonies, creating shortages that, as chapter four will show in greater detail, had a significant impact on recovery from disaster. Interestingly, because it increased the number of wide open deforested ground, it appears the plantation

¹⁷⁵ *PP*, HoC [C.9205] West Indies. Correspondence, p. 16, Moloney to Chamberlin, 29 September, 1898.

¹⁷⁶ Frederick A. Ober, *Our West Indian Neighbours: The Islands of the Caribbean Sea, "America's Mediterranean"* (New York: J. Pott & Company, 1904), p. 379

¹⁷⁷ TNA, CO 23/185 (Bahamas) Correspondence, Original-Secretary of State: Despatches, Governor Rawson To Earl of Canarvon, 17 October, 1866

¹⁷⁸ 'Thousands are destitute', *Lebanon Daily News*, 14 August, 1903.

system had a negligible effect on the vulnerability of people in the Caribbean to earthquakes, and potentially actually limited the number of casualties. If we take 1907 or 1843 as an example, there were actually very few casualties. In this sense, we can see the indirect manner in which plantation agriculture limited the vulnerability of the societies of the British-controlled Caribbean to earthquakes.

2.5 The vulnerability of individual residences

This chapter has so far focused its attention on the plantation, which has necessarily meant it has mostly covered vulnerability in terms of the environment. This section of the chapter examines the architecture of houses across the spectrum of wealth and freedom in Caribbean society and within and without urban spaces. The social sciences term ‘built environment’ is used to describe the constructed elements of British rule in the Caribbean. This term is employed to avoid the delineation of rural and urban, which has limited utility when examining the islands of the Caribbean in the nineteenth century. Hazards often affected both rural and urban environments simultaneously.

Unlike in the central Americas where indigenous societies created sprawling urban centres, the settlements of indigenous Caribbean peoples did not expand beyond small villages. Therefore, while the implementation of plantation agriculture significantly changed the existing environment, with the arrival of European colonialists, the urban centres in the British Caribbean were an entirely new creation. At the very beginning of British colonisation when homes were nothing more than ‘simply shelter’ modelled on indigenous huts, as British

settlements expanded there were no construction styles or techniques from which to borrow and/or learn.¹⁷⁹

As the expansion of British settlement progressed, that lack of pre-colonial urban architecture precluded any hybridity in the architectural style. In *Hurricanes and Society* Mulcahy provides the most effective summation of the development of British Caribbean architecture in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Broadly, what can be seen from Mulcahy's work is that particularly in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, there were some attempts to adapt British construction techniques to the demands of the climate and hazards in a meaningful manner. Great houses on plantations were often limited in height and decorative features compared to their British counterparts. However, the development of specific hurricane shelters separate from houses was one of the most standout features of these adaptations. Hurricane shelters were small rotund buildings that acted as bunkers during storm winds. However, as the third chapter will show they and other adaptations were unevenly pursued over the Caribbean. Broadly speaking, when it came to the houses of the plantation owners and other homes, climatic adaptations were not directed towards climatic events such as hurricanes, but simply towards mitigating a more everyday enemy: the heat. Though moving beyond the temporal limits of Mulcahy's work, this section of the chapter shows that in many ways the patterns identified by him in the unevenness of the deployment of adaptations to climatic hazards recur in the nineteenth century.

It can be seen that there was a reticence to engage in meaningful adaptations that might go some way to mitigating the damage wrought by hurricanes on an annual basis. Traditionally this reticence to adapt has been seen as part of a strategy on the part of the planters and colonial staff to retain and assert their Englishness in the face of a foreign and

¹⁷⁹ Pamela W. Gosner, *Caribbean Georgian, the Great and Small Houses of the West Indies* (Washington D.C.: Three Continents Press, 1982), p. 7.

threatening environment. As Michael Connor's puts it, 'The English colonists did what they could to continue their familiar modes of fashion and style in the tropics, whether in dress, diet, or architecture. The English plantocracy tried to retain the mother-country's architectural styles in the eighty degree heat'.¹⁸⁰ Chapter three will explain in greater detail why this reticence existed.

Despite in some cases limiting the floors and decorative features, the houses of plantation owners were often grand. They were to purposely display the wealth of their owners; these were the houses through which the planters asserted themselves on the Caribbean.¹⁸¹ The aim for planters, as Sheller argues, was to build Caribbean estates that rivalled Britain's own great houses.¹⁸² Indeed, in *Four Year Residence in the West Indies*, the author Frederick Bayley re-prints a letter from his father in which he recounts visiting a great plantation house in Antigua that he praised for being 'perfectly English'.¹⁸³

Whilst many of the houses of plantation owners may have looked 'perfectly English', their height was not. In contrast to English stately houses of the early nineteenth century, generally speaking those in the Caribbean appear to have been limited in size both as a reaction to the cost of shipping construction materials but also an important reaction to the storms and hurricanes of the region. The writings of those who visited the British Caribbean colonies provide a great insight into the construction of the region's built environment, because they usually foreground details that contrasted with what they were accustomed to in their homeland; thus through their writing the adaptations (but also lack of) become apparent. Frederick Bayley, who visited Barbados in the early 1820s, relates visiting a plantation house called Colville Hall which he described as a 'commodious building, one storey high'.¹⁸⁴ Here

¹⁸⁰ Michael Connors, *Caribbean Houses: History, Style, and Architecture* (New York: Rizzoli, 2009), p. 126.

¹⁸¹ Sheller, 'Quasheba, Mother, Queen', p. 27.

¹⁸² Sheller, *Consuming the Caribbean*, p. 71.

¹⁸³ F.W.N. Bayley, *Four years' residence in the West Indies* (London: W. Kidd, 1830), p. 305.

¹⁸⁴ *Ibid*, p. 45.

the mention that the building is only one-storey high is important. This is one of the few clear adaptations that as in the eighteenth century was still visible in the nineteenth century.¹⁸⁵ In her account of a visit to Jamaica in *The West Indies* (1841), Nancy Prince makes note that the ‘best houses’ were usually built low on account of the hurricanes and earthquakes.¹⁸⁶

In Bayley’s observation of nineteenth-century Barbadian architecture, we can see that adaptation did extend beyond the estates of the rich and to some buildings of greater public utility. Bayley describes Codrington College as ‘perfectly weatherproof’, although sadly he does not elaborate on what exactly made Codrington College weatherproof. It is telling however that he does not use that descriptor for any other buildings.¹⁸⁷ In light of Bayley’s comment, it is notable that in the *Account of the Fatal Hurricane*, the author relays that the large building of Codrington College was the only one in the neighbourhood that did not entirely fall down (though it did lose its roof).¹⁸⁸

Whilst the great houses of the Caribbean were to some degree adapted to at least the heat of the region, efforts were not expended on accommodation of public utility. In *Six Months in the West Indies*, Henry Coleridge makes a note of the fact that the garrison on Dominica at Morne Bruce was ‘infamous, and in such a climate, most cruel’.¹⁸⁹ Notably, this building deemed to have been so poorly adapted to the climate was ‘utterly destroyed’ in the hurricane of 1834.¹⁹⁰

The regular frequency with which a colony was subject to hurricanes also seems to have influenced the level of adaption. Antigua, Tobago and Grenada had been regarded as being out of the regular path of hurricanes. It is notable in the cases of these islands that glass

¹⁸⁵ Mulcahy, *Hurricanes and Society in the British Greater Caribbean*.

¹⁸⁶ Prince, *The West Indies*, p. 4.

¹⁸⁷ Bayley, *Four years’ residence in the West Indies*, p. 55.

¹⁸⁸ Editor of the ‘West Indian’, *Account of the Fatal Hurricane*, p. 106.

¹⁸⁹ Coleridge, *Six Months in the West Indies*, p. 147.

¹⁹⁰ TNA, CO 71/78, Meeting of His Majesty’s Privy Council, Dominica, 26 September, 1834.

was regularly still used in the windows of houses when it had been abandoned elsewhere. Writing in 1844 in *A History of Antigua*, Lanaghan Flannigan notes that houses throughout the capital St John's had glass windows, a choice made, the author presumes, because the island had not suffered a hurricane since 1792.¹⁹¹ In 1835, the island was hit by a hurricane that caused some damage to plantation houses; one was completely unroofed.¹⁹² However, there was supposedly damage of a more serious nature in the capital St John's where several large buildings were 'partially damaged or entirely ruined', leaving the poorest class of inhabitants without shelter.¹⁹³ Yet, despite the damage being so focused on St John's, it is clear from *A History of Antigua* (written in 1844) that neither the hurricane of 1835 nor the earthquake of 1843 were considered severe enough to merit a change to this style of construction or, if they were, adaptations were not widely deployed.

On Tobago following the hurricane of 1847, Lieutenant Governor L. Graeme noted in his survey of damage that many of the cottages of labouring classes had glass windows that were entirely destroyed.¹⁹⁴ In a text titled *The Seaman's Practical Guide for Barbados and the Leeward Islands* written to help sailors deal with the sailing conditions in the region, the author draws a specific link between the use of glass in houses on Grenada and the perceived lack of a threat from hurricanes:

It is said the hurricanes never reach this Island, as proof of which, the windows are without outer shutters, and are fitted with glass, which cannot resist the force of these terrible winds.¹⁹⁵

¹⁹¹ Lanaghan Flannigan, *Antigua and the Antiguans: A Full Account of the Colony and Its Inhabitants from the time of the Caribs to the Present Day* (London: Saunders and Otley, 1844), p. 203.

¹⁹² TNA, T1/4397, McGregor to Gleneg, 22 August, 1835.

¹⁹³ TNA, T1/4397, Loving to MacGregor, 13 August, 1836.

¹⁹⁴ Historical Documents of Trinidad and Tobago No.3, Reid to Grey, 20 November, 1847.

¹⁹⁵ A captain in the Royal Navy, *The Seaman's Practical Guide, for Barbadoes and the Leeward Islands; with observations on the islands from Blanco to the Rocas on the Coast of La Guayra* (London: Smith, Elder & Co. Cornhill, 1832), p. 24.

By direct contrast, in the *Account* of the 1831 hurricane, persons reporting their experiences to the author note that to get ready for hurricane they drew the shutters and bolted them with hammer and nail.¹⁹⁶ It also must be acknowledged that the same account makes note of much smashed glass in the church; clearly limiting the amount of glass as a means to limit hurricane damage did not extend to buildings where glass was considered an essential part of their function.¹⁹⁷

One other key adaption that seems to have occurred in response to the storms and hurricanes appears to be a change in the materials generally used to roof larger buildings. In contrast to British houses in the nineteenth century, which commonly used slate to roof houses, generally speaking the majority of houses in the Caribbean appeared to use shingles. As Coleridge put it, houses in this region ‘universally’ used shingles as their main sources of roofing.¹⁹⁸ Coleridge’s statement is not necessarily accurate however. The *Account* of the 1831 Barbadian hurricane and accounts of a hurricane that hit Antigua in 1837 show that many houses used a form of tile for roofing, but it is through these reports that we can see the advantage that shingles provided over roofing tiles. In both 1831 and 1837, there are reports of roofing slates being lifted clean from roofs and in transit posing a severe threat to lives as the wind launched them as projectiles. In 1831, the *Account* suggests that flying roof tiles actually killed a few unlucky persons. By contrast, shingles posed no such threat. However, as Coleridge notes the shingles on which the Caribbean was reliant were exclusively imported from the US. Reflecting on Piers Blaikie *et al*’s definition of vulnerability, it is clear that like the timber that was sorely lacking because of deforestation, having to import material to rebuild lengthened the time it took for recovery. Indeed, as chapter five will show, allowing duty-free importation of shingles amongst other construction materials was common

¹⁹⁶ Editor of the ‘West Indian’, *Account of the Fatal Hurricane*, p. 72, 107.

¹⁹⁷ *Ibid*, p. 55.

¹⁹⁸ Coleridge, *Six Months in the West Indies*, p. 145.

practice in post-hurricane situations. However, as chapter four will also demonstrate, duty-free importation placed a financial burden on the colonial administration, which had to use its own money to finance duty-free imports, thus limiting the funds available for relief.

Though they may have tried to adapt, the great estates were not always the safest place to be during a hurricane although they may have been viewed as such. The *Account of the Fatal Hurricane* provides a particularly rich eyewitness account of the destruction wrought on the great houses of the island. Of the anecdotes in the *Account*, one of the most notable details is the extent of the damage wrought on Fustick Hall in Barbados. Fustick Hall was occupied by a Mr Thomas Edgehill and his family, and was completely blown down despite its stone walls.¹⁹⁹ From the story that Mr Edgehill relayed to the author of the account, it is possible to get a sense of the steps taken to face the hurricane by those who occupied larger houses. Edgehill described repeatedly attempting to nail shut the windows to no avail following which action his family was dressed and prepared for the hurricane, by which one assumes that they were dressed in any clothes they had that would be most suitable for the storm.²⁰⁰ When Edgehill perceived a lull in the storm to signal that it would return with vengeance, he wisely moved his family outside; the house soon collapsed.²⁰¹ Of those remaining inside, Edgehill's mother and eight enslaved people, seven were instantly killed and one died soon after.

Whilst its tree cover may have saved Dominica from significant landslips and soil deformation, its society, which was undeveloped compared to that of Barbados, was not saved from the winds. In the wake of the 1834 hurricane, the destruction of the built environment, houses and towns was total. In 1834, the Lieutenant Governor of Dominica

¹⁹⁹ Editor of the 'West Indian', *Account of the Fatal Hurricane*, p. 107.

²⁰⁰ *Ibid*, p. 107.

²⁰¹ *Ibid*, p. 108.

reported that following the hurricane ‘the whole of the negro population is unhutted ... and many of the best residences on the estates are levelled to the earth’.²⁰² Hillsborough Estate was entirely destroyed with not a single building left standing. However, on the Goodwill Estate for the most part buildings were left standing despite the assessor believing that they were subjected to the strongest force of winds.²⁰³ On at least four other estates, the great houses were entirely destroyed. In all cases, the huts of the apprenticed labouring population were all destroyed.²⁰⁴ Similarly to 1831, fatal injuries were caused to labourers by the collapse of the great houses.²⁰⁵ In consequence of this evidence, it is clear that the majority of the bigger houses owned by the planters were not safe. Though they were viewed by all as safe because they were more substantially built, it seems that they actually engendered greater vulnerability as deaths appear to have frequently occurred when they collapsed. The very fact that they were built with bricks and mortar made them more deadly.

Despite some of the limited adaptations, in many cases there was little those in the great houses could do. In 1834, one planter recounted that his only recourse was to simply hide under his bed as the storm approached.²⁰⁶ The apparent helplessness of this planter provides a stark contrast to those in the early parts of the eighteenth century who according to Mulcahy made use of purpose-built hurricane shelters.²⁰⁷ Whilst it appears that there was little the planters themselves could do in the face of a hurricane, for some observers it was also felt that there was little they could do when it came to limiting the vulnerability of the houses to hurricane damage.

²⁰² TNA, CO 71/78, McGregor to Rice, 27 September, 1834.

²⁰³ *Dominica Colonist*, 27 September, 1834.

²⁰⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁰⁵ *Ibid.*

²⁰⁶ TNA, T1/4397, Extract of letter from Rosalie Estate contained within Laidlaw to Gregg, 2 October, 1834.

²⁰⁷ Mulcahy, *Hurricanes and Society*, pp. 128-129.

In the case of the 1847 hurricane on Tobago, John Davy remarked that ‘The people are paralyzed by this calamity, which is the first hurricane that has visited the island since its earliest settlement by the Dutch; of course the houses were not constructed to resist violent tempests’.²⁰⁸ And yet to his apparent confusion he noted that the hurricane had a ‘partial action’ and that there were ‘Instances of frail structures escaping, when strong buildings adjoining were blown down’.²⁰⁹ Graeme, the lieutenant governor, was of the opinion that Tobago was not hit directly by the vortex of the hurricane.²¹⁰ It could have been that in the case of 1847, the geography of the island prevented the hurricane’s winds from acting evenly upon the island, as Davy also noted that large portions of the island’s forest remained untouched by the wind while others were stripped bare.²¹¹

Overall however it seems that at least from the perspective of the inhabitants of the Caribbean’s great houses, there seems to have been little that they could do to be confident in limiting the damage done to their properties. It appears that for the most part, unless a hurricane was particularly strong, the houses of the plantation owners generally weathered storms. In both the Bahamian hurricane of 1866 and the Barbadian hurricane of 1898, there was notably little destruction to estate dwellings. In 1898 in particular, it was noted that some of the larger buildings were unroofed but for the most part they came off ‘wonderfully well’.²¹² In a similar vein, Governor J. S. Hay expressed ‘anxiety’ but provided little detail on the scale of the damage, which given the propensity of colonial officials to provide extremely

²⁰⁸ Historical Documents of Trinidad and Tobago No.3, Reid to Grey, 20 November, 1847.

²⁰⁹ SOAS, Incoming correspondence. Tobago/Box 1, Extracts from Published accounts of the Tobago Hurricane of 1847.

²¹⁰ Historical Documents of Trinidad and Tobago No.3, Reid to Grey, 20 November, 1847.

²¹¹ SOAS, Incoming correspondence. Tobago/Box 1, Extracts from Published accounts of the Tobago Hurricane of 1847.

²¹² *PP*, HoC, [C.9205], West Indies. Correspondence, p. 20, Governor S. J. Hay to Chamberlain, 29 September, 1898.

detailed accounts of hurricane damage in many of the events considered in this thesis would suggest that it certainly was not the level of damage seen in 1831.²¹³

What is notable across all cases is that where planters may have suffered inconsistent losses, the enslaved and later labouring population always suffered the highest proportion of losses, nearly always losing their entire houses. The institution of slavery limited both the location of where the enslaved could build their huts and the materials and scale on which they could build them. These huts were generally of wattle and daub construction with a thatch-work roof of vegetation. In no way were these buildings able to withstand hurricane force winds that were capable of levelling stone houses. However, in comparison to the great houses of the estates, their inevitable collapse posed less of a threat to life than falling masonry. That said, at least in the period of slavery, the proximity of the huts of the enslaved to sugar works and estate buildings enforced by the institution meant that whilst they were unlikely to be injured by the collapse of their own house, its position meant that with its easy destruction they were more readily exposed to the potentially collapsing stone buildings found on the estates. Indeed, in 1831 there were many cases of enslaved people being killed by falling estate buildings.

There was some limited differentiation in the huts of the enslaved and later labouring classes where certain dwellings, at least to British eyes, took on a more solid cottage-like appearance. In the 1820s, Frederick Bayley noted that the huts of the enslaved were ‘built of wattling...roofed with a thatchwork of palm or coconut branches: some, however, were of wood, and others had shingled roofs’.²¹⁴ Similarly, on Tobago, Graeme does make note that there was a more varied range of wealth in the labouring cottages – some of them were not

²¹³ Ibid.

²¹⁴ Bayley, *Four years' residence in the West Indies*, p. 90.

damaged, as there were some with shingles that were proper cottages.²¹⁵ However, sadly, this appears to have made little difference to their vulnerability. In 1831, 1834 and 1847, observers report a near total destruction of the huts of the enslaved and labouring classes respectively.²¹⁶

In the latter half of the nineteenth century, at least in the case of the 1866 and 1898 hurricanes, little appears to have changed in terms of the construction of the dwellings of the labouring classes. In both events they suffered the greatest destruction of property (though notably in both cases there are no reports of death by the collapse of buildings that were so apparent in the account of 1831). The accounts of destruction in the wake of the 1898 hurricane are particularly notable, showing how little the housing the labouring population was able to build for themselves had developed; despite the hurricane being mild enough to leave most stone residences untouched, the labouring classes suffered astronomical losses. An estimate for the loss of huts of the labouring classes was put at 9937 huts destroyed and 4519 damaged, leaving 50,000 homeless.²¹⁷ In particular, in Barbados we can see how despite the gains of freedom, precarious employment left the dwellings of the labouring classes as vulnerable to destruction as they were in 1831, despite the hurricane being weaker by many accounts. In Barbados, precarious rental and employment arrangements led to the creation of chattel houses, houses that were purposely built to be portable and thus without deep foundations. This housing was obviously, and still is where it survives today, extremely liable to being destroyed by hurricane strength winds.

²¹⁵ Historical Documents of Trinidad and Tobago No.3, Reid to Grey, 20 November, 1847.

²¹⁶ TNA, CO 71/78, Colquhoun to Rice, 12 November, 1834.

²¹⁷ *PP*, HoC, [C.9205], West Indies. Correspondence, p. 8, Hay to Chamberlin, 27 September, 1898; F. A. Hoyos, *Barbados: A History from Amerindians to Independence* (London: Macmillan Caribbean, 1978), p. 17

2.6 The built environment

So far, this examination of the built environment has considered dwellings in isolation, however there were some substantial urban spaces in the region. The following section addresses urban spaces in the Caribbean through the lens of the hurricanes covered in this thesis. Post-hurricane, the spread of disease can be one of the central risks to enclosed urban spaces. Hurricane-strength winds spread waste and other dead organic matter that can quickly amass into piles that rot and poison water supplies and otherwise create fertile breeding grounds for disease; this remains a problem today, it was a key concern in 2017 following hurricane Maria where disease was said to pose a greater risk to life than the storm itself.²¹⁸ In the cases of the nineteenth-century hurricanes considered in this thesis, disease seems to have been a post-disaster concern but one that appears to bear little correlation to what were generally be considered healthy and unhealthy urban spaces.

Bridgetown, the capital of Barbados, was frequently characterised as an unplanned and thoroughly unlikeable capital. In 1802, Daniel Mckinnen described Bridgetown as having refuse-filled streets and ‘warped’ wooden buildings.²¹⁹ Similarly unimpressed, John Waller described it as ‘everywhere ill-built with crooked and unpaved streets’.²²⁰ Later, in the early 1820s Bayley provides an equally disparaging description of Bridgetown: ‘for the most part, irregularly built, without any regard to order, or the slightest attention to the rules of architecture’.²²¹ Yet, despite this irregularity and the large amounts of refuse that amassed in 1831 following the hurricane, there were few if any small outbreaks of disease throughout the island. The capital of Antigua, St John’s, was struck by a hurricane on 12 August 1835 and was soon after gripped by an epidemic of yellow fever. In direct contrast to Barbados, St

²¹⁸ Adam Rogers, ‘After Hurricane Maria, Could Puerto Rico Be at Risk of Cholera’, *Wired*, 29 September, 2017, <<https://www.wired.com/story/puerto-rico-health/>>, [20/11/ 2017].

²¹⁹ Welch, *Slave Society in the City*, p. 37.

²²⁰ *Ibid*, p. 58.

²²¹ Bayley, *Four years’ residence in the West Indies*, p.31.

John's was described as a town that was well laid out with wide roads that intersected each other in spacious squares.²²² In *A Winter in the West Indies* by Joseph Gurney, St John's is described as being of 'considerable size, pleasant and airy, and greatly increased and improved since the date of freedom'.²²³ Similarly, in *Four Years' Residence in the West Indies*, St John's is described as 'a very pretty town' with wide, regular streets.²²⁴

Despite this, an English doctor John Nicolson noted that 'the sea ... aided by the wind deposited a quantity of marine organic matters and vegetable rubbish about the wharves'.²²⁵ It was this rubbish that was established by Dr Nicholson as the origin of the yellow fever outbreak.²²⁶ Although Nicholson established the causality on the basis of the outdated miasma theory, in his thesis A.J. Berland posits that this rubbish may have still played a role as the transition from dry to wet weather brought on by the hurricane caused an explosion of mosquito numbers.²²⁷ After successive fires, Bridgetown had changed significantly to become a more spacious and open town by 1898 and yet following the hurricane of that year, outbreaks of dysentery soon followed.²²⁸ Consequently, the layout of towns in the British Caribbean does not seem to have played a significant role in the creation of disease conditions post-hurricane. However, particularly in the comparison between 1831 and 1835, what the later chapter on short-term responses to disaster will show is that the speed and scale of the post-hurricane clearing played a significant role in limiting the potential for human loss through disease.

²²² Flannigan, *Antigua and the Antiguans*, p.202.

²²³ Gurney, *A winter in the West Indies*, p. 52.

²²⁴ Bayley, *Four years' residence in the West Indies*, p. 305.

²²⁵ Thomas Nicholson, *An Essay on Yellow Fever: Comprising the history of that Disease as it appeared in the islands of Antigua in the years 1835, 1839, and 1842, with an appendix continuing the History to 1853* (London: John Churchill and Sons, 1866), p. 6.

²²⁶ *Ibid*, p. 6.

²²⁷ Berland, 'Extreme weather and social vulnerability in colonial Antigua', p. 151.

²²⁸ Richardson, *Economy and Environment in the Caribbean*, p. 91.

While the configuration of urban space in the nineteenth-century British Caribbean appears to have played a negligible role in exacerbating vulnerability to hurricanes, the inverse was definitely true in the case of earthquakes. This chapter has already shown that given the large amount of wide, open land turned over to the plantations, earthquakes had little effect on the rural areas of the British Caribbean colonies. Plantation agriculture in fact minimised the level of urban construction and increased the amount of open areas, thus meaning that in many cases as tremors began there were large swathes of open areas for the labouring population to occupy. In the cases of the Antiguan earthquake of 1843 and the Jamaican earthquake of 1907, eye witnesses expressed a level of gratitude for the earthquake at least having taken place in the daytime, meaning that the majority of the labouring population were out of their homes and urban areas and instead in open fields.²²⁹

However, in its urban spaces, the two earthquakes of the nineteenth century caused severe damage. In the span that this thesis covers, there were only two major earthquakes that occurred in the British-controlled Caribbean: the 1843 Antiguan earthquake and the 1907 Jamaican earthquake. However, in both cases examining vulnerability in the built environment of St John's and Kingston (the respective capitals most effected by the damage in 1843 and then 1907) remains important to later understanding the construction of relief in both cases.

As previously mentioned, the indigenous peoples of Central America created urban spaces and the indigenous peoples of the Caribbean did not. So while the implementation of plantation agriculture significantly changed the existing environment, with the arrival of westerners, the urban centres in the British Caribbean were an entirely new creation. Importantly, the lack of pre-colonial urban architecture precluded any hybridity in the

²²⁹ *Parliamentary Papers* (1907), House of Commons [Cd.3560], Jamaica. Correspondence Relating to the Earthquake at Kingston, Jamaica, on 14th January, 1907, p.70, Admiralty to Colonial Office, 23 February, 1907.

architectural style, so there were no urban construction styles or techniques from which to borrow and/or learn from. Consequently, as this section will demonstrate, British colonisers brought with them one of the greatest hazards of the urban centres of the old world: fire. Fire was one of the most common hazards faced in the urban centres in all of the centuries of British rule in the Caribbean. In her survey of the first two centuries of British control of the Leeward Islands, Natalie Zacek relates that fires were such a regular occurrence because of the tightness of the largely wooden towns that residents just became accustomed to them.²³⁰ In the closely packed streets of Bridgetown, Barbados, fires were a regular occurrence. During his residence on the island, Bayley writes of having witnessed a particularly violent one, but also interestingly notes that fire engines were not as readily available in the West Indies as in Britain.²³¹

Across the British Caribbean, urban centres were frequently constructed largely of timber and as a consequence earthquakes often started large conflagrations as domestic fires and large stores of flammable materials were shaken loose. In the case of the two earthquakes considered in this thesis, the Antigua earthquake of 1843 and the Jamaican earthquake of 1907, fire played a deadly role in 1907 and was potentially the largest single cause of fatalities. Conversely, there was no fire following the earthquake of 1843, but only it appears because the town had recently been subject to a large fire. The configuration of urban space in the nineteenth-century British Caribbean increased vulnerability to earthquakes because of the risk of the epiphenomenal hazard of fire.

For most of the seventeenth century, Jamaica's capital was located on a sandbar that extended out into the ocean in front of where Kingston would later be built. The capital called

²³⁰ Natalie A. Zacek, *Settler Society in the English Leeward Islands, 1670–1776* (Cambridge University Press, 2010), p. 23.

²³¹ Bayley, *Four years' residence in the West Indies*, p. 74.

Port Royal was hit by an earthquake in 1692 and, given its location on a sandbar, the town was effectively swallowed as the earthquake induced liquefaction in the sand undermining its foundations. In response, the new capital was built on the mainland, away from the precarious sandbar that had formed the poor foundation of Port Royale. Despite Kingston having been rebuilt in respect to the hazard posed by earthquakes, it was left vulnerable to the threat posed by urban fires. Most notable for this thesis is the fire of 1882, which began in a warehouse that held construction materials. Laws were passed in 1882 to prevent the usage of the roofing materials that were determined to have caused the fire, yet it appears to have changed little about the proximity of buildings as the fire of 1907 triggered by the earthquake began in the same area as the fire of 1882.²³²

In 1907 Kingston was so vulnerable to the outbreak of fire that it appears the conflagration of that year was actually spawned by a number of smaller fires that occurred immediately after the earthquake. In particular the earthquake appears to have ruptured a gas pipe in an optometrist's practice which quickly started a fire in what was described as an entirely wooden building.²³³ The second fire appears to have started when naphtha, which was stored illegally without proper holding vessels, was split and similarly ignited another dry wooden house.²³⁴ These two fires spread with rapidity fed by the fact that most residences contained unsecured gas stoves that exploded in the heat.²³⁵ This huge conflagration took three days to fully burn out and still smouldered two weeks after the earthquake. The fire was of such a scale that it consumed Kingston's entire business district. Though we cannot know how many deaths it caused directly, contemporary observers posited that it caused the largest

²³² Jay Robert Nash, *Darkest Hours* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 1976), p. 309.

²³³ JARD, IB/5/76/4/56, E. A. Hodges, 'The Secret History of the Earthquake'.

²³⁴ Ibid.

²³⁵ Ibid.

share of the casualties; it definitely caused the greatest economic loss and in the ensuing legal wrangling over insurance it without doubt prolonged the time it took for the city to recover.²³⁶

In direct contrast to the earthquake of 1907 there was no great fire following the earthquake of 1843. However, the lack of a major conflagration following the 1843 earthquake does not necessarily disprove the link between fire and earthquakes. Rather it can be seen that Antigua's capital St John's, the single area of more densely built environment, had suffered from regular conflagrations and a particularly severe one in 1841 that left the capital without several large stores by the port. Earthquake-triggered conflagrations were not uncommon in St John's. In 1833, there was a minor earthquake that caused a fire whose growth was only averted by the speedy response of a person who chopped down the trees on fire.²³⁷

There was a severe fire in 1841 that destroyed a large portion of the town. Flames are described as having leapt from building to building, suggesting that the houses of St John's were built in close proximity. The author also makes it clear that the houses of St John's were built from wood.²³⁸ The strength of the fire was severe enough that it also burnt out stone houses completely, leaving only the walls remaining. The finest houses and the biggest warehouses were said to be among the victims.²³⁹ When the *History of Antigua and Antiguan*s was written, the author states that it was eight months since the fire and that in place of the buildings grass had grown up. It appears from Parliamentary records that Antigua applied for no compensation from Britain following the fire. Consequently, it seems plausible that as the author of *History of Antigua and Antiguan*s suggests, it would have taken a 'long, very long time' to rebuild the burnt area. Consequently, it is conceivable that if this area

²³⁶ Ibid.

²³⁷ Flannigan, *Antigua and the Antiguan*s, p.197.

²³⁸ Ibid, p.197.

²³⁹ Editor of the 'West Indian', *Account of the Fatal Hurricane*, pp.216-217.

remained unoccupied in 1843, it in part explains how no fire was sparked in the wake of the 1843 earthquake. The earthquake of 1843 is said to have affected the harbour drastically, suggesting that if there had been buildings there a conflagration would have been likely. It is also worth noting that the French colony of Guadeloupe was also struck by the earthquake of 1843, albeit more directly, and subsequently one of the island's largest urban centres, Pointe-à-Pitre, was consumed by fire.²⁴⁰

In the first half of the nineteenth century, at least outside of the urban setting, the basic nature of the dwellings of the labouring classes in incidences of smaller earthquakes had been seen to limit the potential for death as their lightweight construction did not threaten to crush their inhabitants.²⁴¹ However, in both 1843 and 1907, it was the respective urban centres that suffered the greatest damage. In the wake of both earthquakes, large portions of St John's and Kingston were reduced to rubble. Despite the great damage in Antigua, the death toll – approximately eighty - was notably low especially when compared to the approximate estimate of 1500 casualties in Kingston. In St John's, the minimal casualties can be attributed to the lack of a fire, a smaller population and the fact that the town was nowhere near as urbanised as Kingston. Noted at the time as perhaps the most crucial factor of all to the low death toll was the fact that in Antigua the labouring population left the city for work and so in the day when the earthquake struck there were less people actually in the city to be crushed by falling buildings.²⁴² By contrast, at the beginning of the twentieth century, regardless of the fact many people left during the day for agricultural labour, Kingston as a developed urban centre had thousands of people still working it. In this respect we can see

²⁴⁰ Jan Kozák and Vladimír Cermák, *The Illustrated History of Natural Disasters* (New York: Springer Science & Business Media, 2010), p. 163.

²⁴¹ Baird, *Impressions and experiences of the West Indies and North America in 1849*, p. 39.

²⁴² Written by an Eye-Witness, 'A Narrative of the late Awful & Calamitous Earthquake in the West India Islands of Antigua, Montserrat, Nevis, St. Christopher, Guadeloupe, on February 8th, 1843' (London: Thomas Tegg, 1844), p. 9.

how the development of Britain's largest trade hub in what was known to be one of the most seismically active areas of the region rendered many vulnerable to earthquakes.

2.7 Conclusion

This chapter has broadly considered the ways in which the plantations and the environmental changes they wrought left the British Caribbean vulnerable to the region's hazards. In each case of nature-induced disaster, because of the plantations and the properties associated with them, the colonies often rested on a web of complex financial arrangements. The destruction the hazard impacts brought with them thus occasioned astronomical economic losses. These economic losses were of such a scale that the plantation owners and colonial officials were reliant on securing external pecuniary relief. This relief was not always guaranteed, took time to arrive and rarely covered the actual losses. These arrangements certainly engendered vulnerability in the British Caribbean colonies and will be covered in detail in the chapter examining long-term responses to hazards.

This chapter has shown the myriad ways in which British colonialism created an environment that had a base level of vulnerability to some of the region's exogenous hazards. In the case of the sugar plantations and hurricanes, we can see, particularly in a comparison between the intense hurricanes of 1831 and 1834, which the ecological transformation wrought by the deforestation left soil without cover, cohesion and sapped it of its fertility. The plantation marginalised other crops that fed the population of the Caribbean colonies whilst the inherent inequalities of British rule across the three chronological types of labour used to sustain it (slavery, apprenticeship and open labour) encouraged those working to produce crops that increased their economic standing and were not necessarily the most hazard resilient. In nearly every case of a hurricane impact and in the cases of the volcanic

eruptions of 1812 and 1902, food needed to be imported to the impacted colonies to mitigate potentially perilous shortages. Similarly, because of large-scale deforestation, timber so essential for the construction of shelter across the spectrum of wealth needed to be imported. In all cases, the plantation had a role to play in prolonging recovery and exposing the survivors of hazards to epiphenomenal impacts from landslips to food shortages. Ultimately, the plantation and the desire for profit undercut the ability of British Caribbean colonies to be self-sustaining under normal conditions, let alone in the face of hazards.

In the case of the built environment, fire which had been such a hazard in seventeenth- and eighteenth-century Europe continued to be a prevalent hazard into the nineteenth century British Caribbean (as it did in Britain's similarly constructed American colonies). In the case of Antigua in 1843, it was conceivable that the earthquake did not trigger a fire simply because parts of the town remained unbuilt following a previous one. In 1907, the earthquake triggered a fire that claimed potentially more lives than the earthquake itself. At least in 1907, fire significantly increased economic and human losses whilst prolonging Kingston's recovery.

In totality, through this chapter we can see that the organisation and construction of British Caribbean society in the nineteenth century was such that it left it significantly more vulnerable to the region's hazards. It must be noted that the lack of an urban environment created by the ingenious peoples meant that there was little creolisation of British colonial architecture in the region. In many ways, it can be seen that this lack of hybridisation went deeper than simply the architecture. In its British colonies, a society was constructed through the plantation and the drive for profit that was ultimately at odds with the region's environment and ultimately unsustainable. As this thesis will go on to show, without a significant injection of Parliamentary loans and grants post disaster, the British colonies in the Caribbean would not have survived in this unsustainable form. As this chapter has already

shown, at least in the design of certain great houses, some adaptations to the region's climate were pursued, but the question remains of why large-scale attempts to mitigate the destructive effects of the region's meteorological and geological hazards were not made. Why was there, as Bonham Richardson puts it, 'climatic complacency'? ²⁴³

²⁴³ Richardson, *Economy and the Environment in the Caribbean*, p. 16.

3 - A legacy of underdevelopment: The Plantocracy and the absence of hazard resilience

Chapter two demonstrated that the plantation and the built environment of the British Caribbean created a set of complex vulnerabilities that exposed its habitants to the potential for a greater loss in the face of natural hazards. That the plantation created vulnerability is not only clear retrospectively, its effects were also evident to contemporary observers.

Consequently, the first portion of this chapter address why, despite its deleterious effects, the plantation remained at the centre of the British-controlled Caribbean. What emerges from this examination is that the plantation remained central to the British Caribbean because it ensured the twin benefits of profit and control of the enslaved and later labouring population. This in turn begs the question, why, even if the plantation complex was considered infallible, were no measures taken to increase the resilience of British Caribbean society against the region's natural hazards. Resilience as defined by Blaikie *et al* concerns 'the measure of the rate of recovery from a stressful experience, reflecting the social capacity to absorb and recover from the occurrence of a hazardous event'.²⁴⁴

In the present day, though human geographers and scholars in international development are working to change perceptions, mainstream discourse on disaster resilience tends to consider resilience in terms of purely scientific adaptations. For example, GPS sensors to track tectonic movement or large-scale storm early warning systems. In fact, resilience can be built through behaviour and societal organisation as well as drawing on knowledge to make adaptive changes to the built environment. As has already been shown in chapter two the Plantocracy were capable of making some selective adaptations to their plantation houses, such as limiting their height. However, despite the whole spectrum of

²⁴⁴ Blaikie *et al*, *At Risk*, p. 76.

Caribbean society suffering regularly after hazard impacts, few, if any, wide societal changes either to behaviour or to the built environment were ever suggested or adopted until the very end of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth centuries.

When compared with examples that pre-date even British colonisation in the Caribbean as well as contemporary examples from Britain, America and India, the lack of resilience in British Caribbean society marks it as an outlier. This chapter argues that because they saw the Caribbean not as a home but as a place from which to derive profit the Plantocracy were ultimately to blame for this underdevelopment. Their vision for the region did not extend as far as developing the colonies' capacity for resilience. Almost all of their profit was exported back to Britain and when it was spent in the region it was on maintaining and expanding profitable cultivation. Consequently, as chapter five will show, this had serious implications for post-disaster rebuilding: rebuilding after a disaster was rarely an exercise in rebuilding better but instead rebuilding quickly so as to resume production with the least possible delay.

Whilst the Plantocracy's influence waned following Emancipation, and later the equalisation of sugar duties in 1846, it left a legacy of underdeveloped colonies designed for only one purpose: the extraction of profit through intensive plantation agriculture. Precisely because the Plantocracy had locked the British Caribbean into a system that was, at least in contrast to the wealth it generated in previous centuries, increasingly profitless, imperial attention shifted elsewhere, namely to India. As this chapter will show, because of the Plantocracy's legacy Britain was effectively left to play catch up to the developments in weather prediction technology developed by the U.S. as they expanded into the region. The development of physical resilience was only to occur in the British Caribbean when it could play a part in reviving the region's economic fortunes.

Dealt with at great length in this chapter is the Plantocracy and their relation to the Caribbean colonies. Though his work relates primarily to the seventeenth century, Andrew Jackson O'Shaughnessy is one of two historians to consider this relationship at length. In his book *An Empire Divided* his central conclusion is that the desire of the Plantocracy to be seen as British and not Caribbean was so strong that despite great commonalities with the American colonists, they sided with Britain during the War of Independence.²⁴⁵ O'Shaughnessy argues that the side the Plantocracy chose reflected the fact they never saw the Caribbean as a true home. However, there was one group, which O'Shaughnessy concedes were perhaps close to resembling a, British in origin, creole population that did regard the region as home; the 'redlegs' of Barbados. The redlegs were a small grouping of poor whites, descended from Irish and Scottish prisoners of war transported by Oliver Cromwell in the seventeenth century.²⁴⁶ In his book *White Creole Culture*, David Lambert provides the only in-depth examination of the construction of redleg identity and argues that they did see the region as home.²⁴⁷ However, as the redlegs were a small grouping, existing on only one island the general consensus on the Plantocracy's relation to region is that white elites almost entirely tended to perceive themselves as British.

Like O'Shaughnessy's work, Lambert's provides useful insights into the construction of the planter world view and identity. However, also like O'Shaughnessy, Lambert's focus differs from this study; he examines white identity through the prism of the abolition movement. What is interesting is that though there is a consensus view that the elites of the British Caribbean saw themselves as British above all, there has been almost no exploration of how this relationship affected the degree to which the Caribbean was developed and

²⁴⁵ Andrew Jackson O'Shaughnessy, *An Empire Divided: The American Revolution and the British Caribbean* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2000).

²⁴⁶ *Ibid*, p. 6.

²⁴⁷ Lambert, *White Creole Culture, Politics and Identity during the Age of Abolition*.

prepared for natural hazards. This chapter answers that question and shows that the Plantocracy's aspiration to retain a British identity worked in tandem with their desire for profit thus leaving the region severely skewed in its development and without the hazard resilience many contemporary societies had established.

3.1 Why the plantation endured

Chapter two established that the point from which so many of the vulnerabilities that afflicted British Caribbean societies stemmed was the plantation. The plantation actively made the impacts of natural hazards demonstratively worse; this was a conclusion both practically observable and theorised by individuals who studied the region's natural environment. On the level of practical observability we can refer back to the example of Mr Foster noted in Griffith Hughes' *Natural History of Barbados*, whose cane-planted land came 'tumbling down' in the face of rain; the link between the plantation and vulnerability was plain to see. Similarly, the fact as mentioned in chapter two that measures were taken to attempt to revive the exhausted soils suggests again that there was some understanding of the deleterious effects plantation agriculture was having on the land.

There were also individuals who not only saw the damage created by the plantation but went further and linked it directly to the Plantocracy. Alexander Anderson in his 1799 book *Geography and History of St Vincent* expressed frustration at the Plantocracy's 'fruitless' deforestation and exasperation at the fact that timber had to be imported from Demerara and Porto Rico at 'vast expense and on a precarious footing'.²⁴⁸ He also highlights the benefits of forest, as he understood them arguing that they it played a vital role in making

²⁴⁸ Richard Grove, 'The British Empire and the Origins of Forest Conservation in the Eastern Caribbean 1700-1800', in *Islands, Forests and Gardens in the Caribbean: Conservation and Conflict in Environmental History*, ed. by Robert S. Anderson, Richard Grove, and Karis Hiebert (Oxford: Macmillan Education, 2006), p. 164.

the climate tolerable, promoting rains and screening the land (one assumes from storms).²⁴⁹ Yet, across the British-controlled Caribbean, the Plantocracy appeared unable and/or unwilling to grasp the damage that plantation agriculture was having on the environment. In isolated cases forest reserves were set aside on St Vincent and Tobago; specifically on St Vincent laws were passed (no doubt because of Anderson's writings) to prevent the clearing away of woods at the sources of the island's rivers that fed estates and ports, presumably so that their flow was not interrupted.²⁵⁰

Anderson and the developments on St Vincent appear to be exceptions however, as overwhelmingly, tropical forest was perceived not just as something that blocked agricultural expansion but as something actually bad for the health of colonists. Early scientific theories such as miasma theory caused British officials to perceive specifically tropical forest negatively, erroneously believing it to prevent the passage of winds and thus locking 'bad air' into the island.²⁵¹ However, this inability to recognise the damage caused by the plantation went further. What can be retrospectively recognised as a form of agriculture that through environmental degradation weakened British colonial society's capacity to resist hurricanes was in fact venerated by whites throughout the Caribbean.

For the Plantocracy, whose fortunes rested on the plantation, the wholesale cultivation of land was of course to be venerated. Because of their fixed profit driven view, the Plantocracy was fundamentally unable to recognise the wider ecological effects of the plantation and thus their grip over the land ensured the vulnerability of the British Caribbean colonies. Though already quoted, Madden's observations of Barbados are, for their insight, worth restating. Writing in 1833 Madden said of Barbados: 'I could see no beauty in this

²⁴⁹ Ibid, p. 163.

²⁵⁰ TNA, CO 263/4 (St Vincent) Legislative Council; Privy Council, 'An Act to Prevent the clearing away of wood at the fountainheads of rivers running to any town or shipping place in this island or that supply estates with water', 3 December, 1811.

²⁵¹ Hughes, *The Natural History of Barbados In Ten Books*, p. 3.

island. If rivers, mountains, and forests are necessary ingredients in the composition of a beautiful landscape, Barbadian scenery has no claim to picturesque attractions'.²⁵²

Though he does not make the linkage explicit, it is clear that he felt Barbados had been stripped of its markers of picturesque beauty by the ever expanding deforestation used to sustain plantation agriculture. Madden mentions that in direct contrast to his view, Barbadians were infinitely proud of their island.²⁵³ Indeed, as already mentioned, Lambert highlights the existence of a specific strand of Barbadian pastoralism that celebrated the island's highly cultivated aesthetic.²⁵⁴ However, in the context of this chapter, the concern is not over how Barbados should have looked, but rather what its cultivated state represented and how the mind-set that enforced that cultivation rendered Barbados unable to adapt to hurricanes. Later in *A Twelvemonths Residence* Madden posits that Barbadians only appreciated their decidedly unpicturesque environment because it 'provided them with advantages to which they were most want of.'²⁵⁵ As Peter Hulme puts it 'so often when landscape is viewed through an imperial optic, the georgic mode dominates its sublime partner, with work and productivity having to triumph over the magnificent scenery and breath-taking views.'²⁵⁶

The ecological consequences of plantation agriculture have already been made clear, but through Madden's comments we are able to see why they were ignored in Barbados in this period. The plantation and the productivity it represented was what was considered beautiful. Cultivation and productivity not only underpinned the British mission for profit but had always been used as the long-held justification for the large-scale imperialist cultivation

²⁵² Madden, *A twelvemonth's residence in the West Indies*, p. 15.

²⁵³ *Ibid*, p. 15.

²⁵⁴ Lambert, *White Creole Culture, Politics and Identity during the Age of Abolition*, p. 180.

²⁵⁵ Madden, *A twelvemonth's residence in the West Indies*, p. 15.

²⁵⁶ Peter Hulme, 'Underdeveloped Estates: Dominica and the Landscape of the New Imperialism', in *Landscape and Empire 1770-2000*, ed. by Glenn Hooper (Aldershot, England ; Burlington, VT: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2005), p. 111.

of the Caribbean.²⁵⁷ Felix Driver notes that when Europeans first encountered the Caribbean the absence of tropical lands that, through European eyes, resembled productive enterprise was used as the justification for the enforced dispossession of native peoples.²⁵⁸

Over time, this reasoning developed so that in the context of the period of slavery both Mimi Sheller and Lambert argue that praise for the cultivated aesthetic became an inherently pro-slavery view.²⁵⁹ In the eyes of the Plantocracy, forest was uncultivated, unproductive land. Consequently, it can be argued that under the control of the Plantocracy there was no way in which Barbados could ever be reforested, as their vested interest embedded vulnerability to hurricanes in the island. To attempt to undo this damage would require limiting the expansion of the plantation and therefore profit. In effect the planter had an appreciation for the systemisation of nature prefigured by the desire for profit; Barbados might appear at a distance as 'bare', but upon landfall through the eyes of the plantation owners it could at once be seen to be beautifully cultivated.²⁶⁰ From this fixed position trees, which as we have seen played a vital role in the region's natural systems and by extension had the potential to grant the islands a level of natural resilience to hurricanes, were perceived negatively.²⁶¹ Hilary Beckles has argued that the Barbadian Plantocracy was the most conservative in the British Caribbean and in their profit-driven attachment to such a destructive form of agriculture and inability to see its side effects, this comment is given new weight.²⁶²

In the period after slavery, the plantation persisted primarily because it was not only the central way in which Britain derived money from its Caribbean colonies but also the

²⁵⁷ Felix Driver, *Tropical Visions in an Age of Empire* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005), p. 14.

²⁵⁸ *Ibid*, p. 14.

²⁵⁹ Lambert, *White Creole Culture, Politics and Identity during the Age of Abolition*, p.180.

²⁶⁰ Sheller, *Consuming the Caribbean*, p. 50

²⁶¹ *Ibid*, pp. 49–51.

²⁶² Hilary McD Beckles, *A History of Barbados: From Amerindian Settlement to Caribbean Single Market* (Cambridge ; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006), p. 85.

institution around which labour, and ultimately control of the formerly enslaved population, was established. At a time when the fear prevailed that without slavery British control could be undermined, the extent of cultivation became the yardstick by which British and American observers measured the health of a colony and the obedience of its labouring population.²⁶³ On a visit to Dominica Joseph Gurney remarked that the labourers worked diligently despite the 'superabundance of fertile wild land.'²⁶⁴ In this context, the plantation and the cultivated aesthetic was of course superior to the wild untamed land that otherwise might have mitigated some of the vulnerabilities created by the plantation.

Over the course of the nineteenth century, though the Plantocracy's influence waned, the emphasis on monocultural production remained a theme underpinning British policy towards the region. In the years 1895-1903, the direction of imperial policy towards the Caribbean under Secretary of State for the Colonies Joseph Chamberlain was directly informed by the belief that cultivation and economic productivity through the plantation was the key to reviving flagging British Caribbean fortunes. When seeking to understand why imperial policy in this period still fetishised the plantation, it is crucial to look at the writings of James Froude, specifically at his book *The English in the West Indies*. Froude and his writings were certainly an influence on Chamberlain. The extent of that influence is most clearly evidenced by the fact that Chamberlain mentioned Froude in his famous 'The True Conceptions of Empire' speech in which he set out his vision for the third stage of the British Empire.²⁶⁵

Froude's writing appears to incorporate both strands of aesthetic appreciation present in the early nineteenth century. The explicit connotation of Madden's aforementioned

²⁶³ George Truman, John Jackson, Thomas Longstreth, *A Narrative of a Visit to the West Indies in 1840 and 1841* (Philadelphia: Merrihew and Thompson, 1844); Gurney, *A winter in the West Indies*, pp. 52, 135, 265.

²⁶⁴ Gurney, *A winter in the West Indies*, p. 178.

²⁶⁵ Charles W. Boyd (ed.), *Mr Chamberlain's Speeches, Vol 2* (London: Constable and Company, 1914), pp.1-6.

comments is that there was beauty to be found in untamed nature; the rivers, mountains, and forests were necessary. Froude shared some of that appreciation, writing on Dominica he noted its ‘exquisite fertility’ and argued that it was ‘the most beautiful of the Antilles’.²⁶⁶ Throughout the book, Froude reinforces these views stressing Dominica as the most beautiful of the Caribbean islands, both implicitly and explicitly because of its untamed nature.²⁶⁷ However, despite aesthetic appreciations to the contrary, the themes that win out in Froude’s writing are ones of cultivation and productivity. Early on he notes that Dominica had ‘a full and ample river’ that wielded ‘waterpower enough to drive all the mills which industry could build’.²⁶⁸ Over the course of *The English in the West Indies*, cultivation essentially becomes a byword for British influence. In Froude’s eyes, Britain had left islands like Dominica in desolation, and when it came to that island specifically he argues that the ‘enterprising youth of England were neglecting a colony which might yield them wealth beyond the treasures of the old sugar planters.’²⁶⁹

Resonating with the key themes of Froude’s writing, Chamberlain framed his imperial policy around the idea that Britain should bear a greater responsibility for developing what he called its ‘underdeveloped estates’ (the colonies, namely the Caribbean).²⁷⁰ In 1897, Chamberlain called a Royal Commission to investigate ongoing economic distress in the region and propose remedies for the situation.²⁷¹ The report drew useful conclusions such as suggesting that work was done to improve inter-island communication. However, the bulk of its suggestions effectively recommended doubling down on intensive cultivation. Specifically in the case of Barbados it recommended the island secured a loan from the Imperial

²⁶⁶ James Anthony Froude, *The English in the West Indies; Or, the Bow of Ulysses* (New York: Scribner & Sons, 1900), pp. 129–130.

²⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 160.

²⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 130.

²⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 160.

²⁷⁰ Hulme, ‘Underdeveloped Estates’, p. 114.

²⁷¹ West India Royal Commission, *Bulletin of Miscellaneous Information (Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew)*, 1897:131, (1897), pp. 343-344.

Exchequer for the establishment of centralised sugar factories; a move that would have further intensified the pressures of cultivation.²⁷²

Through the writings of Froude, Chamberlain and the 1897 Royal Commission, we can understand why even toward the end of the nineteenth century the intense cultivation of the British-controlled Caribbean could not be reversed despite recognition nearly a century before of the vulnerabilities it introduced. Indeed, as chapter two showed in 1898 and continuing into the twentieth century, food shortages and landslips afflicted many of the islands mentioned in the Commission's report. Through British eyes, abandoning cultivation of this sort in the Caribbean was tantamount to abandoning the region itself. In his 'The True Conceptions of Empire' speech, Chamberlain may have suggested he was prepared to move away from old modes of thinking in which the colonies were viewed 'as possessions valuable in proportion to the pecuniary advantage which they brought to the mother country.'²⁷³ This however appears ultimately as rhetoric. Applied to the Caribbean, Chamberlain's policy of development only extended as far as making the colonies profitable for Britain. In the absence of a replacement, the plantation with all of its attendant vulnerabilities lived into the twentieth century regardless of whether, in the absence of the Plantocracy, colonists and travellers venerated its aesthetic.

3.2 A land for profit

The first half of this chapter established why the plantation, which created so many vulnerabilities, was not altered or removed as the centre of British Caribbean colonisation. The plantation was the machine of profit and power for the planters and the alterations to the region's environment it necessitated could be rationalised under the rubric that cultivated land

²⁷² Ibid, p.401.

²⁷³ Boyd (ed.), *Mr Chamberlain's Speeches*, Vol 2, pp.1-6.

is better than uncultivated land. However, the question remains that even if the Plantocracy were unwilling and/or unable to see the damage wrought by the plantation, why was there so little development of how hazards were responded to? The almost complete absence of any calls for an investigation into a way to potentially limit the damage caused by the region's hazards in the documents that cover British governance of the region over the nineteenth century is striking.

To understand this, this half of the chapter further examines how the Plantocracy related to the British Caribbean. O'Shaughnessy has argued that the Plantocracy never saw the Caribbean truly as a home and were merely 'sojourners', attached to their British identity. Where O'Shaughnessy argues that this inability to see the Caribbean as home meant the Plantocracy did not support the American Revolution, this half of the chapter develops his interpretation in a new direction: if the Plantocracy did not see the Caribbean as home, how did this affect the region's capacity for hazard resilience?

In the early nineteenth century, the Plantocracy effectively controlled the decision-making apparatus of the British Caribbean colonies. Legislative and privy councils were chaired by those who had plantations or represented absentee owners. In patterns that had changed little from the inception of British Caribbean colonialism, colonial Governors and their attendants also usually had plantation holdings. Thus, those who politically controlled the Caribbean had a monetary incentive to ensure the survival of the plantation. In contrast to the profit motives central to Caribbean colonialism, British colonisation of America was driven by a desire to create a new home. That moment may have existed in British colonial thinking owing to the proportion of people arriving in the region fleeing from or as prisoners

of the English Civil War, but it passed quickly.²⁷⁴ Land and then wealth came to be controlled by the minority. British colonialism was a global project instigated to enrich the mother country but perhaps more than in any other British possession, it was in the Caribbean that this goal guided their development.

Whilst the overall profitability of the plantations for Britain as a whole remains contested, there can be little doubt that they did return serious profits for certain individuals. Some of those profits were spent in the Caribbean; as chapter two showed the great houses on plantations were the means by which they attempted to maintain their British identities. However, their wealth was largely channelled back to Britain, where the planters in fact built houses far grander than those in the Caribbean, rather than investing in the region that created it. Though at different rates on different islands, this pattern remained largely unchanged and over time planter absenteeism became endemic in the region.²⁷⁵ It is in this context that we can build a picture of British Caribbean society. It was mostly bifurcated between white elites and enslaved people of African descent. In most British Caribbean colonies, there were smaller groups of poor whites (as mentioned they were largest in number on Barbados) and the quasi middle class – usually plantation overseers and administrators. These second groups were, as noted, small minorities on the colonies. On Barbados where this grouping was largest, it still only formed half of the island's total white population and critically they did not have a voice in the organs of government.²⁷⁶

The Plantocracy bound the enslaved to this society through force and fear: one group simply brutally exploited the other. Though abolition obviously threatened the power of the

²⁷⁴ Michael Craton, 'Reluctant Creoles: The Planters' World in the British West Indies', in *Strangers within the Realm: Cultural Margins of the First British Empire*, ed. by Bernard Bailyn and Philip D. Morgan (Williamsburg: The University of North Carolina Press, 1991), p. 314.

²⁷⁵ Douglas Hamilton, *Scotland, The Caribbean and the Atlantic World, 1750-1820* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2005), p. 161.

²⁷⁶ Lambert, *White Creole Culture, Politics and Identity during the Age of Abolition*, p. 78.

planters, it can also be seen that it showed they had little imagination for what the Caribbean might resemble without slavery (other than ruined). In place of slavery, mass Christianisation of African-Caribbean peoples gradually came to be considered as *telos* for the white elites in control of Caribbean society. However, the Plantocracy were somewhat ambivalent about religion in the region. Christianity, though allowing further systemisation of the lives of African-Caribbean people, represented a danger to plantocratic control. It empowered them through teaching them to read, write and fundamentally conceive of something greater than their present circumstances. The perceived danger most clearly manifested itself in the Jamaican Baptist war of 1831 which was a large scale rebellion that was borne directly from organising in churches. However, Christianity also had advantages for white elites when specifically responding to the natural hazards of the Caribbean.

In the first half of the nineteenth century, in the immediate aftermath of disaster, days of humiliation were often called by governors.²⁷⁷ Such days were usually announced in a proclamation that ordered the population to pay thanks to the almighty that the damage occasioned by a hazard was not greater. Days of humiliation and more broadly, public worship, had previously been used in Britain in the eighteenth century and earlier during times of dearth and shortage, but as Philip Williamson shows their usage was in decline in the nineteenth century.²⁷⁸ Generally, they were reserved to mark royal events or were intended as a national show of solidarity.

The question remains then, at least in the first half of the nineteenth century, why was the Caribbean out of step in this regard? Firstly, there is control; a day of humiliation allowed white elites to enforce stricter controls on what they deemed acceptable behaviour –

²⁷⁷ Such days were called following hurricane in 1815, 1831 and 1835 as well as following the eruption of 1812 and the earthquake of 1843.

²⁷⁸ Phillip Williamson, 'National Days of Prayer: The Churches, the State and Public Worship in Britain, 1899-1957', *English Historical Review*, 128:531 (2013), p. 328

something which, as chapter five will show in greater detail, they viewed as crucial in the disruption created by disaster. But there also appears a deeper more theological benefit to colonial administrators calling these days. In the nineteenth century, white elites appear to have moved beyond seeing the region's hazards as visitations of divine retribution (indeed as this chapter will go on to show, from 1833 onwards attempts were made to study hurricanes in a scientific manner), but it helped them to have the African-Caribbean population believing that they were. There was certainly a strong fear of hurricanes and earthquakes. These were events that were etched onto people's minds as Baird notes 'everyone had a story to tell about the last hurricane'.²⁷⁹ African-Caribbean populations, as Lady Maria Nugent noted in her travels in Jamaica, made prayers to guard against the earthquakes despite at the point at which she wrote in 1801 a serious earthquake had not affected the island since 1692.²⁸⁰

It appears that in the nineteenth century at least, white elites did not publically make prayers against natural hazards. Even whilst they did not view hazards as divine visitations, characterising them as such had benefits. Days of humiliation and fasting were usually initiated with proclamations such as 'the almighty has seen it fit to visit this island with a dreadful visitation', such rhetoric externalised the misery created by the hazard and directed it away from the failings of the system of agriculture and governance enforced on the region and the people. Ultimately, the mentality of the planters suggests they wanted nothing more than stasis – the continued farming of plantations for profit by enslaved Africans. Beyond profit British Caribbean society was effectively rudderless; as Michael Craton puts it, the region was 'denuded of political and cultural leadership'.²⁸¹

²⁷⁹ Baird, *Impressions and Experiences of the West Indies and North America in 1849*, p. 54.

²⁸⁰ Frank Cundall (ed.), *Lady Nugent's Journal: Jamaica One Hundred Years Ago* (London: Adam&Charles Black, 1907), p. 24.

²⁸¹ Craton, 'Reluctant Creoles The Planters' World in the British West Indies', p. 315.

This lack of leadership again reflects the fact that the Plantocracy did not see the Caribbean as a land in which they might permanently settle. Consequently, they constantly strove to retain their British identity. In Dunn's *Sugar and Slaves*, he highlights the extent to which the Plantocracy maintained English clothing habits despite the heat and left themselves 'hopelessly entangled in debts' just to import British 'furniture, clothing and plate.'²⁸² However, the strength of feeling the Plantocracy had for their British identity is best demonstrated through an exploration of the educational habits of the Plantocracy.

O'Shaughnessy shows that nearly all of the Plantocracy sent their children to be educated in Britain.²⁸³ Even when Codrington College was re-opened on Barbados in 1796 for the education of whites, the island's planters still overwhelmingly chose to send their children to schools in England.²⁸⁴ Collectively, Dunn and O'Shaughnessy posit that the Plantocracy strived to keep their British identity not only as a reaction to their unfamiliar environment but also to distance themselves from the enslaved to whom, because of the plantation, they had to live relatively close.

The way in which the British Plantocracy saw themselves as remaining distinctly British appears in contrast to the attitudes and behaviours of their French counterparts. In *A Four Years Residence*, Bayley relates to the reader a journal kept by a British friend on a visit to French Martinique. The contrast between the characterisations of the British Plantocracy and that of the French relayed through Bayley are striking:

The French must be amused, and their colonists are not like our English people, always going backward and forward, to and from the mother country. France only

²⁸² Richard S. Dunn, *Sugar and Slaves: The Rise of the Planter Class in the English West Indies, 1624-1713* (New York: Norton, 1973), p. 271.

²⁸³ O'Shaughnessy, *An Empire Divided*, pp. 19–27.

²⁸⁴ *Ibid*, p. 19.

was, but Martinique *is* the home of its inhabitants, and they are attached to it as such.²⁸⁵

The level of attachment the French had to their colonies was such that it was palpable to this British observer on a single visit to Martinique. The strength of this attachment is also clearly seen in a collection of the letters of French Martinican planter Pierre Dessalles. Dessalles frequently referred to Martinique as his home and on trips to France expressed homesickness for his Caribbean life.²⁸⁶ On a trip back to France later in life, when an acquaintance expressed a desire for Dessalles to remain there, he wrote ‘he will not succeed. I am very anxious to go home.’²⁸⁷

Dessalles’ diary gives us a rare insight into the mentality of a French planter and when placed against Christer Petley’s examination of Simon Taylor, perhaps the richest British planter of the eighteenth century, the difference is striking. Though Taylor was educated in England, he was born in Jamaica and owned a great amount of property there as well as managing property for others.²⁸⁸ Also as has already been mentioned, atypically for the planter class, Taylor was an active participant in the island’s politics and governance. He was a member of the island’s assembly, local legislature, chief magistrate of his parish and lieutenant general of the island’s militia.²⁸⁹ In stark contrast to Dessalles, who expressed homesickness for Martinique and a general distaste for France, Taylor, despite his myriad mental and material connections to Jamaica, saw Britain as home. He referred to Jamaica as ‘this island’ but considered returning ‘home’ for health; the distinction between the two is

²⁸⁵ Bayley, *Four years’ residence in the West Indies*, p. 268. Emphasis author’s own.

²⁸⁶ Pierre Dessalles, *Sugar and Slavery, Family and Race: The Letters and Diary of Pierre Dessalles, Planter in Martinique, 1808-1856*, ed. by Elborg Forster and Robert Forster (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996), pp. 196–197.

²⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 123.

²⁸⁸ Christer Petley, “‘Home’ and ‘This Country’”: Britishness and Creole Identity in the Letters of a Transatlantic Slaveholder’, *Atlantic Studies*, 6.1 (2009), p. 48.

²⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 46.

clear. In *Four Years' Residence*, Bayley relates the observations of a Briton's trip to Martinique that shows how the stark difference between English and French colonists might have impacted their respective built environments. Bayley's friend relates that:

The great houses of the estates, as we cruised along the coast appeared to me more like the country seats of our English gentlemen than any other others I had seen in the West Indies.²⁹⁰

It is striking that Bayley's friend makes such a direct comparison between the great houses of British and French planters. However, one could argue that outside of this individual's potential aesthetic appreciation of the great houses of French planters and those of the British, ultimately the same pattern was being followed in the French colonies; despite their greater attachment to their colonies French planters spent their money on grand edifices all the same. What difference did their attachment make to French Caribbean society? Bayley's friend goes on to write with regard to the town of St. Pierre that 'really it is a beautiful place – perfectly European; and I know no town in our colonies to be compared to it.'²⁹¹ Again, Bayley's friend draws a direct comparison with British Caribbean colonies and, despite being British, finds them inferior to the French colonies. We can contrast the observation of Bayley's friend with Bayley's own observations of the squalor of Barbados' capital Bridgetown where he makes mention of the fact that poor whites were described as living in the 'meanest hovels.'²⁹²

In the context of Craton's remark that the British Caribbean was effectively denuded of 'political and cultural leadership', it is also interesting that Bayley observed that there were few places of public entertainment in the British Caribbean and that visitors and inhabitants

²⁹⁰ Bayley, *Four years' residence in the West Indies*, p. 265.

²⁹¹ *Ibid*, p. 266.

²⁹² *Ibid*, p. 62.

alike had to make their own entertainment. Indeed, it is common throughout the travel writing in this period on the British Caribbean that visitors were invited to dances at plantation homes but otherwise remark on how little there was to do other than tour the plantations.²⁹³ Again, in contrast, Bayley's friend marvelled at the quality of theatres and general entertainment available in Martinique.²⁹⁴ These observations provide another angle from which we can see the hollowness of British Caribbean society; there was in effect little *society*. On the issue of British Caribbean society in his *A History of Jamaica*, Edward Long expressed his disdain for the absentee planter and argued that they ensured that Caribbean society could never be more than a simulacrum for real British society.²⁹⁵ Absenteeism has often been pointed to as the rot at the heart of British Caribbean society, almost symbolic of this point Bayley notes that whilst there are many good houses in the British Caribbean, it was the houses of the absentee planters that were the worst kept and in the most advanced state of decay.

It can clearly be seen that planter control of the Caribbean played a significant role in preventing the colonies from becoming anything more than the plantations and the infrastructure that supported them. There were of course other buildings in the region but as O'Shaughnessy observes, West Indian elites otherwise primarily built 'fortresses, naval dockyards, and military barracks.'²⁹⁶ In other words, when the planter was prepared to focus time and resources it was on buildings that served to facilitate and protect commerce. Such a trend was observed by contemporary visitors. On a visit to Bridgetown, Barbados, John Waller stated that 'there are some public edifices which do honour to the colony' such as the church which he goes on to describe as 'spacious and elegant' to the extent that he almost

²⁹³ Ibid, p. 581;

O'Shaughnessy, *An Empire Divided*, p.5. O'Shaughnessy notes that there may have been 'artistic work that "fostered local pride"', but most of these authors and scholars were visitors, temporary residents, or absentees.

²⁹⁴ Bayley, *Four years' residence in the West Indies*, p. 368.

²⁹⁵ O'Shaughnessy, *An Empire Divided*, p. 3.

²⁹⁶ Ibid, p. 3.

finds it incongruous with the rest Barbadian architecture.²⁹⁷ That said, besides the church, it turns out that the only other public buildings he regards as having merit are the Courthouse and Gaol, the Freemasons' Hall and the Government House and that 'these are large and well built, but have nothing particular in them to merit a more detailed description.'²⁹⁸ Through Waller we can see that in Bridgetown at least the only public buildings of merit were the ones that represented the trifecta of ways in which the Plantocracy ensured control – religion, law and political power.

At the end of the nineteenth century, reflecting upon the centuries of British occupation of the Caribbean in *The English in the West Indies*, Froude noted that the 'English have built those islands as if we were but passing visitors, wanting only tenements to be occupied for a short time.'²⁹⁹ Froude's remarks are suggestive of the overriding motives of British Caribbean colonisation or profit over home, but his remarks also hint at the consequences of this approach; in effect the buildings themselves lacked a permanent character and they were not built with the same care that other colonial powers had employed in the region. Elsewhere in *The English in the West Indies*, Froude employs a comparison to show the comparative under-developemnt of British Caribbean society:

Kingston is the best of our West Indian towns, and Kingston has not one fine building in it. Havana is a city of palaces, a city of streets and plazas, of colonnades, and towers and churches and monasteries.³⁰⁰

Like many British travel writers before him, Froude highlights the striking material variances between the British and other Caribbean colonisers. However, he goes further with this

²⁹⁷ John Augustine Waller, *A Voyage in the West Indies: Containing Various Observations Made During a Residence in Barbadoes, and Several of The Leeward Islands* (London: Sir Richard Phillips and Co, 1820), p. 6.

²⁹⁸ *Ibid*, p. 6.

²⁹⁹ Froude, *The English in the West Indies, or, the Bow of Ulysses*, p. 291.

³⁰⁰ *Ibid*, p. 292.

comparison, indirectly addressing this question of the British Caribbean as home by remarking that in Cuba:

The Spanish race has taken root there, and is visibly destined to remain. They have poured their own people into it. In Cuba alone there are ten times as many Spaniards as there are English and Scotch in all our West Indies together, and Havana is ten times the size of the largest of our West Indian cities.

The implication that the British 'race' had not taken root in its colonies speaks to the idea that it was never truly home to British people; the British had never 'taken root' in the Caribbean. Froude's point in effect acts as a reply to Long's prediction that British Caribbean society would never be more than a simulacrum of British society. In the same chapter that the above quotes are drawn from, he draws on Ozymandianesque language to argue that the British Caribbean had moved on from the age of the planter suggesting that their 'desperate deeds...are gone, even to the remembrance of them. What they were and what they did lies buried away in book mausoleums.'³⁰¹

Travel writers followed Froude in the early twentieth-century making comment on the crudeness of what Britain had built in the Caribbean, but in its rich description and indirect hint at the question of home, Froude's book acts as a useful bookend from which we can see that the British never truly regarded the Caribbean as a home.³⁰² The region was, as O'Shaughnessy puts it, 'a land of exile' never a place they planned to 'live, prosper, and die.'³⁰³ That the Plantocracy did not see the Caribbean as a true home is a point which historians generally agree on and this chapter has so far clearly established. It is, however, the

³⁰¹ Ibid, p. 291.

³⁰² Francis Dodsworth, *The Book of the West Indies* (London: George Routledge & Sons, 1904), p.146. Francis Dodsworth on a visit to Bridgetown, Barbados in 1902 remarks that he saw 'nothing of interest whatever'.

³⁰³ O'Shaughnessy, *An Empire Divided*, p. 3.

full implications of this detachment that have not yet been fully explored. This detachment from the region in which those in control of governmental apparatus lived hindered any combined societal effort to mitigate the impact of natural hazards. Beyond making architectural adjustments to their private residences, what incentive did the planter, let alone the absentee planter who seldom ventured to the Caribbean, have to invest in methods to increase hazard resilience?

3.3 Comparing British Caribbean resilience

Given the frequency of hurricanes and earthquake in particular the lack of a collective societal response is striking when considered in the context of the proliferation of schemes of civic development spreading through America and Britain in the early nineteenth century. In America and Britain, the first decades of the nineteenth century witnessed the beginning of concerted efforts to develop urban living spaces in respect of the problems they faced such as access to water and sanitation. In the first half of Mary Ryan's *Civic Wars* we can see that, though it was not without serious conflict, in the early nineteenth century American public spaces were places where people came together and debated the problems faced in cities and developed plans to address them.³⁰⁴ Similarly, at the beginning of the nineteenth century Britain was witnessing the growth of a middle class and an increase in civic activity enabled by acts of Parliament. This was, as David Eastwood's *Government and Community in the English Provinces* suggests, the period in which local government was born.³⁰⁵

Between 1760 and 1799, some 427 new improvement commissions had been established by statute, giving commissioners new and considerable powers to improve

³⁰⁴ Mary P. Ryan, *Civic Wars: Democracy and Public Life in the American City during the Nineteenth Century* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), pp. 21–131.

³⁰⁵ David Eastwood, *Government and Community in the English Provinces, 1700-1870* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1997).

the policing, lighting, paving, water supply, and fabric of towns. This momentum was maintained into the nineteenth century, and in the years 1800-1845 almost 400 Local Improvement Acts were passed, covering building regulation and sanitary provision in 208 English and Welsh towns.³⁰⁶

Obviously Britain was not subject to natural hazards like the Caribbean so there is no analogous comparison to make in regard to hurricanes, earthquakes or eruptions, but the point stands: the cities of Britain became home to a burgeoning middle class who set about purposely improving their surroundings in respect to the problems they faced. However, specifically in the context of disaster adaptation, we can see from the previous chapter that although small architectural adaptations were made to individual private residences, across British Caribbean society there was no widespread attempt to engineer resilience. In that society why would there be a reorientation of society in a manner that respected the region's hazards when money was to be extracted not invested in the colony itself?

It might be considered anachronistic to examine and, in this case, question the absence of resilience to hurricanes and earthquake in societies that existed before many of the technologies now regarded as essential to creating resilience to these hazards. But the point of exploring resilience is to gauge whether a society pursued collective efforts to increase resilience, and not necessarily to judge how effective they were. Turning first to the indigenous peoples of the Caribbean, archaeological research has shown that they were fully cognisant of the recurrent nature of the hazards they faced in the region and adaptations to these were hardcoded into the fabric of their society. Though there were adaptations such as windbreaks utilised in the communal areas, it is in the materials and methods of construction that the level of resilience to the region's common natural hazards is most apparent.

³⁰⁶ Ibid, p. 66.

Indigenous dwellings were built on bedrock for secure foundations that allowed them to resist high winds and earthquakes. Crucially, their relatively simple construction limited the risk of injury from falling debris, meant they were easy to repair and where they were destroyed allowed for quick rebuilding (especially as these societies did not exhaust the natural resources available to them).³⁰⁷ As A.V.M. Samson *et al* point out, the very purposeful decisions in regard to construction taken by the indigenous people of the Caribbean were the ones the ‘European colonizers misinterpreted as expedient and insubstantial.’³⁰⁸

In the context of considering why those in control of the British Caribbean did not pursue wide ranging adaptations and limited ones to their own property it could be argued that British colonisers were not likely to accept living in indigenous-style huts for long (the first British constructions in the Caribbean were actually remarked upon as resembling native huts, but were also simultaneously decried by contemporary observers on that basis).³⁰⁹ Initially, British settlers had little idea of the violence of the natural hazards they would face in the Caribbean, but some level of resilience was possible even in the sixteenth century. Crucially, however, resilience to natural hazards does not extend solely to building adaptations. It is possible to organise a society in a manner that makes it more resilient.

Anthony Oliver Smith’s analysis of Incan hazard resilience is a great example of how adaptations can be effectively imbedded in societal structures. Smith uses the term ‘verticality’ to describe the fact that across the environments inhabited by Incan society mechanisms of aid were set up, for example in which those affected by flooding in coastal areas received aid from those unaffected and vice versa in other cases of hazard impacts.³¹⁰

³⁰⁷ A. V. M. Samson *et al*, ‘Resilience in Pre-Columbian Caribbean House-Building: Dialogue Between Archaeology and Humanitarian Shelter’, *Human Ecology*, 43.2 (2015), p. 332.

³⁰⁸ *Ibid*, p. 333.

³⁰⁹ Mulcahy, *Hurricanes and Society in the British Greater Caribbean*, pp. 118-123.

³¹⁰ Anthony Oliver-Smith, ‘Peru’s Five-Hundred Year Earthquake’, in *Disasters, Development and Environment*, ed. by Ann Varley (Chichester: John Wiley and Sons, 1994), p. 78.

What is more, Incan society actively resisted expanding into areas known to suffer from frequent hazard impacts even if they were fertile. They also prepared for future hardship by creating points for food storage known as *qollqas*.³¹¹ Similar to the indigenous people of the Caribbean, the Incas also developed a number of effective construction methods to mitigate earthquake impacts. Critically, what emerges from Smith's article is an account of a society organised in a manner that respected and prepared for the recurrent natural hazards present in the environment it inhabited. In light of this, it is striking that, so few defined patterns of response to hazard impacts emerged in the British Caribbean. Despite frequent impacts, relief was almost always conducted on an ad hoc basis and little effort was expended on rebuilding in a manner that attempted to anticipate and mitigate future damage.

In the case of the Incan example, that system relied on a great deal of reciprocity within that society to function. There was a system of reciprocity that also existed between the British colonies. In all of the events considered in this thesis there is a pattern of neighbouring colonies offering supplies or monetary support to those impacted by natural hazards. Indeed, this appears to have been the only written rule given to incoming governors in regard to a situation in which they might find the colony in distress.³¹² In an eighty eight point instruction guide for incoming governors to St Vincent, the region's natural hazards were not mentioned once whilst law, sovereignty and finance were detailed exhaustively. This guide was written in 1783 and stresses that sufficient stores must be maintained if war disrupted trade routes, no doubt a sensible acknowledgement of the island's vulnerability. Yet, such a suggestion was not ordered to be maintained through the hurricane season. Point eighty two of the manual orders the governor to assist the governors of other neighbouring colonies if anything 'disturbs the plantations': this is perhaps the closest it comes to

³¹¹ Ibid, p. 64.

³¹² TNA, CO 260/3 (St Vincent), Correspondence, original-Secretary of State, Untitled file, effectively an 88 point instruction guide for the incoming Governor of St Vincent, 1783.

mentioning a set pattern of crisis response that could be read as indirectly addressing hazard impacts.³¹³ However, in this we can, as ever, see what remained at the centre of colonial priorities: the plantation. Although there was a system of reciprocity that existed in the British-controlled Caribbean and functioned in times of distress, the relief supplied was rarely more than a stopgap and of limited effectiveness because, at least in the case of hurricanes, several neighbouring islands were regularly affected at once, thus rendering them unable to feed their own populations let alone offer supplies to nearby colonies.

Within islands with such a bifurcated and oppressive system of control, there was little possibility of an effective reciprocal system emerging. Nor was it possible, with profit and not sustainable habitation as the driving motivator of British Caribbean colonisation for expansion ever to be limited in the manner of the Incas. Spanish colonialism destroyed these coping methods and, as Smith puts it, ‘produced an infrastructure for disunity, not integration, and ultimately, an agricultural nation which [became] dependant for food on outside sources.’³¹⁴ Though addressing the legacy of Spanish colonialism in South America, Smith’s conclusions clearly resonate a great deal with the pattern of British expansion in the Caribbean and the vulnerabilities it introduced.

The British did not have to look solely to the indigenous peoples of the Caribbean or the Incan empire to see active strategies for creating resilience. Though they did not face the same hazards, such collective efforts are present in British history. From Jeremy Purseglove’s *Taming the Flood* we can see that in Britain there was a sustained and concerted effort to control flooding in the marshlands of East England.³¹⁵ Funded with large amounts of capital here was a collective societal effort to try to find ways to limit the scope of flooding that so

³¹³ Ibid.

³¹⁴ Oliver-Smith, ‘Peru’s Five-Hundred Year Earthquake’, p. 83.

³¹⁵ Jeremy Purseglove, Tony Soper, *Taming the Flood: History and Natural History of Rivers and Wetlands*, 1st edition (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), pp. 40-75.

often laid waste to property and people in the Fens region.³¹⁶ Purseglove's book shows that these schemes were far from trouble free, and indeed were not always successful, but the critical point is that there was a collective effort to attempt to limit the effects of a recurrent environmental hazard.

Through the eyes of Robert Baird, a traveller who visited Antigua in 1849, we can see the reality of what the detachment of those in control of the British colonies meant in practice:

On all hands I was informed that, previous to the terrific earthquake which visited Antigua and her leeward sisters in 1843, the town of St John's was much more handsome and regular than it is now; evidence of the truth of the remark is to be seen in the numerous negro huts, crowded into spaces between more opulent looking mansions; spaces which had been formerly occupied by houses of greater pretension and magnitude, but which in the present condition of matters, even in Antigua their owners had not found it convenient to rebuild, after they were shaken down by the earthquake itself.³¹⁷

In the context that earthquakes were not uncommon in the Leeward island chain, it is striking that even six years after the earthquake parts of St Johns remained derelict and undeveloped. This is indicative of the lack of attachment those in control of British Caribbean society had to these colonies. If it was considered too much to rebuild, then it was certainly not within the capacity of that society to devote time and resources to rebuilding in a manner that responded to the threat of earthquakes. In contrast to the descriptions of Martinique relayed in Bayley's *A Four Years Residence*, there was an apparent lack of civic pride striking enough for Baird

³¹⁶ Basil E. Cracknell, "Outrageous Waves" *Global Warming & Coastal Change in Britain through Two Thousand Years* (Chichester: Phillimore, 2005), p. 54.

³¹⁷ Baird, *Impressions and Experiences of the West Indies and North America in 1849*, p. 38.

to have recorded it. It is again not anachronistic to question the absence of a collective effort to engineer resilience specifically to earthquakes. Leaving aside the Incan adaptations highlighted by Smith, we can consider the example of Lisbon that, following its near total destruction from an earthquake in 1755, was rebuilt in a manner that to the best understanding of the day was seismically resistant.³¹⁸ It could be argued that Lisbon was a capital of both a country and an empire so its importance ensured that those in control of its governance would seek to limit the potential for damage in the future. Acknowledging that supports the argument that those in control of the British Caribbean did not afford it a level of importance in this manner, and that these were events to be weathered not opportunities to invest in preventative measures. On Antigua with its far smaller population, even limited efforts to rebuild the town in a seismically responsible manner would have been comparatively easy to implement; but, as we can see from Baird's observation, it was simply easier to allow the town to decay.

The 1843 earthquake also provides us with another example by which to draw out this comparative lack of collective will in regard to hazards and rebuilding. On Guadeloupe, having suffered damage from the same earthquake, both commercial interests and government officials came together to agree that there was little point in rebuilding the old-style sugar infrastructure of mills and boiling houses. Instead, they began the building of centralised factories with the first being constructed in 1847.³¹⁹ Centralised factories worked not only to advance the industry but also to pool the risk with collective ownership in a physically less disparate set-up that allowed their rapid repair. Here we can see a collective

³¹⁸ Nicholas Shrady, *The Last Day: Wrath, Ruin, and Reason in the Great Lisbon Earthquake of 1755* (New York: Viking, 2008).

³¹⁹ J.H. Galloway, *The Sugar Cane Industry 600-1950: An Historical Geography from its Origins to 1914* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), p. 157.

response to hazard that effectively decreased risk, not least because it had the potential to limit the downtime when a hazard affected production.

On Antigua in 1843, eyewitness accounts attest to the damage wrought on the island's sugar infrastructure. Testimony published in Antigua's *Weekly Register* suggested that of 172 mills, 117 were irreparably damaged and the remaining 55 needed significant repairs.³²⁰ Yet, contrasting the steps taken by the French on Guadeloupe, on Antigua following the earthquake, no such top down action was taken to limit risk in this manner and centralised factories were only considered in 1897 following the West Indies Commission Report.³²¹ As a response to the hurricane that struck Tobago in 1847, the construction of centralised factories was also suggested by Lieutenant Governor Graeme who believed it would be the quickest way to regain output.³²² The idea of centralising the sugar factories to limit the effect natural hazards had on a colonies' key industry was not one outside of the imagination of British officials.

It is also worth noting that collective action seems to have taken place in the French colonies earlier than 1843. Trevor Bernard and John Garrigus's *The Plantation Machine*, shows that the French colonists of Saint-Domingue were ordered by administrators to rebuild entirely out of wood as a response to an earthquake in 1770.³²³ Contrastingly, in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries in British colonies, such adaptations appear to have occurred on a more ad-hoc basis without top-down pressure. In *Four Years' Residence*, Bayley relays that in Bridgetown, Barbados' houses were 'generally speaking...of wood, supported by pillars of brick or stone', which suggests a level of adaptation combining the

³²⁰ SOAS, MMS/17/02/02/01, Accounts of the Earthquake in Antigua on the 8th February, 1843.

³²¹ West India Royal Commission, p. 385.

³²² Historical Documents of Trinidad and Tobago No.3, 20 November, 1847.

³²³ Trevor Burnard and John Garrigus, *The Plantation Machine: Atlantic Capitalism in French Saint-Domingue and British Jamaica* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2016), p. 54.

relative strengths of wood and stone to combat the hazards of the Caribbean environment.³²⁴ However, in the same description Bayley notes the ‘hovels’ in which the poor white classes lived. Such a distinction between homes speaks to the uneven spread of environmental adaptation and reflects the lack of collective will to render British Caribbean society more resilient as a whole.

The pattern of ad-hoc adaptation seems to characterise much of British adaptations to the region’s hazards. In *Hurricanes and Society*, Mulcahy notes that in the eighteenth century specific hurricane shelters were constructed in the South Carolina lowlands and throughout the Caribbean. These low rotund shelters were effective at preserving life to such an extent that a local observer made the point that any property that included them within its grounds would definitely be enhanced in value.³²⁵ However, Mulcahy suggests that towards the end of the eighteenth century they fell out of fashion in the Caribbean despite their obvious utility. That said, in South Carolina buildings built expressly to protect the enslaved continued to be built into the nineteenth century. Again, in contrast to the British Caribbean, we can see that in places where people regarded themselves as at home, efforts were directed towards methods by which societal resilience could be engineered and even extended to the enslaved population.

In the case of the decline in British use of hurricane shelters, it is curious that the decline occurred at the time when the campaign for abolition began to gain traction. Abolitionists often sought to stress the deleterious effects slavery had on the plantation owners. In response plantation owners, in addition to engaging in some reforms notionally designed to ameliorate the condition of the enslaved, sought to stress their British identity by obtaining and maintaining the traditional markers of British identity. Perhaps it is in this

³²⁴ Bayley, *Four years’ residence in the West Indies*, p. 31.

³²⁵ Mulcahy, *Hurricanes and Society in the British Greater Caribbean*, p. 128.

context that we can view the decline of purpose-built hurricane shelters towards the end of the century when these arguments became increasingly prevalent. Hurricane shelters would have had no British counterpart and thus they represented a step too far for those planters seeking to maintain their British identity.

This portion of the chapter has so far established that the planters who controlled the British Caribbean did not regard the region as a true home; they were ‘sojourners’. In the context of hazard reduction, we can see that this lack of attachment to the Caribbean, in contrast it would seem to their French counterparts, appears to have led them to pursue singular adaptations to their own properties (such as the reduction in floors highlighted in chapter two). However, this was also limited by the fact that in the case of hurricane shelters the planters seem to have abandoned even those most useful private adaptations. In the bifurcated and oppressive society they created, there was no incentive to invest money anywhere other than the plantations. The voice of those who suffered on a near annual basis from these hazards rarely emerges. In contrast, even in places where hurricanes were not as common, purposeful steps were taken to limit the potential for future damage. On 23 September 1815, an extremely destructive hurricane hit New England.³²⁶ Providence, Rhode Island, one of the towns that suffered the worst damage, was rebuilt entirely in a manner, which, to the best knowledge of the day, had resilience to hurricanes at its core:

[they] raised and fortified the riverbanks and constructed bigger wharves and stores on higher ground. They replaced the last of the 17th-century dwellings that the settlers had erected along the harbor with modern houses set above the new flood line. On the hillsides surrounding the waterfront, they introduced more durable building practices.

³²⁶ Rob Emlen, ‘200 Years Ago Today: Remembering the Great Gale of 1815’, *Providencejournal.Com* <<http://www.providencejournal.com/article/20150923/opinion/150929751>> [24/10/2016].

*The effects of the Great Storm of 1815 on the people of Rhode Island could be seen in the new look of their landscape.*³²⁷

In this context a plea from the anonymous author of the *Account of the Fatal Hurricane of 1831* is particularly striking. In the *Account*, the author asks the reader:

would it not be advisable so that the colonists, to the utmost of their ability, should be at all times prepared to encounter the impending danger-not alone by a life of virtue and religion...but also by a commendable precaution in constructing buildings more calculated to withstand the force of the elements than those usually erected?³²⁸

The author of *The Account* cannot be said to be pushing for a large-scale collective effort such as was pursued in Rhode Island in 1815 to render the colony safer in times of storm, but definitely implies that there is little effort expended on preparing the colony for the inevitable and that more could be done beyond the approach informally established by the Plantocracy class, which is to simply weather the storms. In *Sea of Storms* Schwartz argues convincingly that the author of this account was Samuel Hyde, a creole himself, a group that in *White Creole Culture* Lambert establishes as having a home-like attachment to Barbados.³²⁹ It is in this context that we should view this rare plea for greater preventative action; the author was not a planter but someone who viewed Barbados as their home and, as such, they made a plea others did not.

³²⁷ Ibid. Author's emphasis.

³²⁸ Editor of the 'West Indian', *Account of the Fatal Hurricane*, p. 25.

³²⁹ Schwartz, *Sea of Storms*, p. 134.

3.4 Shifting imperial priorities and scientific developments

While this chapter has so far focused on the early nineteenth century, an examination of hazard resilience in the latter half of the century only serves to further paint the Caribbean as an outlier in its lack of development. Over the course of the nineteenth century, the collapse of the Plantocracys' wealth and thus influence left the Caribbean low down British priorities. Contrastingly, India grew as the focus of British imperial attention and as such received a growing number of scientific developments to help it cope with natural hazards. Although these were not always successful and/or well-meaning in relation to the indigenous population, the intent was there. As the nineteenth century progressed, the Caribbean appears to have been entirely left behind as scientific developments were increasingly utilised in British colonial India to engender resilience.

Particularly in the case of cyclonic storms, we see that over the course of the nineteenth century British officials in India developed a sophisticated warning system. Ironically, the seed of this work came from research conducted in the Caribbean by British Lt. Col William Reid, a British Royal Engineer who was sent to the Leeward islands after the hurricane of 1831. Reid, inspired by the work of U.S. meteorologist William Redfield, set about trying to discern the nature of the region's storms. His work was published as *An Attempt to Develop a Law of Storms by Means of Facts* in 1838.³³⁰

Reid's work may have improved safety at sea for British sailors. Previously, the recommendation for sailors had simply been to stop shipping during hurricane season, despite this being sound advice it was frequently ignored.³³¹ Reid's work was instrumental in getting the British Navy to implement a meteorological policy on the grounds that it would increase

³³⁰ William Reid, *An Attempt to Develop the Law of Storms by Means of Facts* (London: J.Weale, 1838).

³³¹ A captain in the Royal Navy, *The Seaman's Practical Guide*, p.15;

The fact this advice was not followed is suggested by the numerous claims for lost shipping contained within the files of the T1/4395 & T1/4396 boxes.

crew safety.³³² Sailor Henry Piddington was inspired by Reid's work and set about conducting his own researches into storms in his native Calcutta. Piddington's work was later drawn upon heavily when the Indian Meteorological Office was founded in 1864 as a direct result of a powerful storm in that year.³³³ In the following year, the Indian Meteorological Office went on to establish the first storm warning system in the British colonies. Though Valhakis has critiqued its effectiveness there can be little doubt that it was the 'largest and most complete system of the kind in the tropics.'³³⁴ The development of the office was prompted by a general realisation that given the terrible effects of the storms, and not just on commercial interests, there ought to be a method to predict and limit their effects.³³⁵ Crucially, this was not a private venture; the British colonial administration financed the development of the Meteorological Office.

Even greater developments toward hurricane resilience were taken in the British colony of Mauritius. A functioning meteorological station had existed on the island since 1870, but having witnessed a devastating hurricane in 1892 Charles Bruce, Governor from 1897 to 1903, personally oversaw the overhauling of the colony's political structures to allow to best respond to the myriad hazards it faced.³³⁶ In particular, to minimise losses, the beginning and end of the financial year was recast to follow the sugar growing season. The island's civil service worked with leaders in the Indian community (the main source of the island's plantation labourers) to ensure that in emergencies government departments were adapted to best meet public need and were given the same priority afforded to business.³³⁷

³³² S. Naylor, 'Log books and the law of storms: maritime meteorology and the British Admiralty in the Nineteenth Century', *Isis*, 106:4 (2015), pp. 771-797.

³³³ Roy, 'The Law of Storms', p. 73.

³³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 80.

³³⁵ Das Gupta, *Science and Modern India: An Institutional History, c.1784-1947: Project of History of Science, Philosophy and Culture in Indian Civilization, Volume XV, Part 4* (Dehli: Pearson Education India, 2011), p. 387.

³³⁶ Sir Charles Bruce, *Milestones on my long journey: memories of a colonial governor* (Glasgow: Robert Maclehose, 1917), p. 96.

³³⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 108-109.

Nothing similar to British efforts in India or Mauritius were to ever exist in the Caribbean colonies in the nineteenth century. There were times when even financing the development of aids to everyday life was a struggle in the Caribbean. Given the scale of shipping that the island handled the establishment of a lighthouse on Barbados, particularly one that was hurricane resistant, was deemed a necessity. A scheme for the construction of one was first proposed in 1835 with Parliament offering to cover half of the expenditure necessary for its construction. However, it proved impossible to get the island's legislature to agree to provide the other half of the funds for its construction and continued upkeep.³³⁸

It was the U.S. who began the development of the first early warning system in the region. During its war with Spain, President William McKinley is reported to have said 'I am more afraid of a West Indian Hurricane than the entire Spanish Navy.'³³⁹ In 1898, U.S. congress passed a bill that called for the establishment of hurricane warning systems throughout the Caribbean.³⁴⁰ In India, Britain recognised the utility of researching and attempting to predict storms in a way that certainly was not possible under the self-interested Plantocracy and was not possible later as the Caribbean slipped down the list of colonial priorities – in part because of the legacy of underdevelopment left by the Plantocracy. At the end of the nineteenth century, in the absence of its own developed system, Britain had become reliant on weather warnings provided by the U.S. system to protect its Caribbean colonies. Following the hurricane of 1898 a series of internal memos hint at terse communications between the Colonial Office and the U.S.'s Barbadian consul regarding the latter's failure to notify the colony of the impending hurricane.³⁴¹

³³⁸ *Parliamentary Papers* (1847), House of Commons [715], Lighthouse (Barbadoes), pp. 1-28.

³³⁹ David Longshore, *Encyclopedia of Hurricanes, Typhoons, and Cyclones* (New York: Infobase Publishing, 2010), p. 303.

³⁴⁰ Caribbean Hurricane Seminar, 1956: Final Report to the Caribbean Hurricane Seminar. Held at Ciudad Trujillo, D.N.

³⁴¹ TNA, CO 28/247 (Barbados) Despatches from James Shaw Hay, governor of Barbados and from Acting Governor Williams, Hall to Chamberlain, 30 December, 1898.

Up until this point Britain had not inquired whether the U.S. was willing to supply storm warnings locally. The U.S. system was effective in that it did detect the storm of 1898 in advance, but it was set up in a manner that meant that according to protocol it was to first notify the U.S. weather bureaus in Kingston and Washington.³⁴² The protocol of the U.S. was such that an observer was not authorised to make singular observations and then initiate warnings on the basis of those observations. Meteorologists were required to send their observations by telegram to other stations in the region so that a collective decision could be made in regard to raising the alarm. After the incident of 1898, the U.S. took the step of changing the protocol so that Trinidad and Dominica were notified in advance and multiple observations made and fed back to Barbados.³⁴³ There was a reciprocal element to the U.S. weather system; their observers and equipment were allowed to be stationed on British territories. Britain was effectively dependent on U.S. largesse. They had devised, funded and built the system, and all Britain had done was simply allowed them build on their colonies to extend the network. In response to complaints in 1898 the U.S. then offered to change it to benefit the British, no doubt because they feared losing British favour and thus their territory permissions, in which case both parties would lose out.

Ultimately, what is crucial to understand is that in the space of five years (taking the U.S. incursion on the Mosquito Coast as the marker for the beginning of them asserting themselves in the Caribbean) the U.S. had, referring back to President McKinley's famous comment, identified hurricanes as a threat to their interests. Then in the space of a year, they established an effective early warning system. The British were forced into the subordinate position of having to ask permission to access it. This situation is all the more striking

³⁴² TNA, CO 28/248 (Barbados) Colonial Office: Letters received from various government offices (departments), other organisations and individuals relating to Barbados, Burr to Fisher, 28 October, 1898.

³⁴³ TNA, CO 28/251 (Barbados) Letters received from various government offices (departments), other organisations and individuals relating to Barbados Wilson to Colonial Office, 5 January, 1899.

considering that such technology not only existed, but was pioneered by the British in India. In this the legacy of underdevelopment is clear; the plantations and those who controlled them precluded the development of societal resilience in the Caribbean. Though they may have made adaptations to their own residences, they ensured that British Caribbean society was bifurcated and oppressive and ultimately focussed only on enriching themselves. The Plantocracy saw the Caribbean not as a home, but a land from which they could make a fortune. The houses and the lives they built there were established to try to hold onto their British identity despite their environment. Such a system precluded any effective collective effort to render the colonies resilient to the hazards they faced.

The point at which the era of the Plantocracy truly began to fade is traditionally pinned as 1846 when the import duties on sugar were equalised across the British Empire. Cuba and Brazil still used slave labour and this combined with the loss of the preferential tariffs meant that the production of the British Caribbean colonies was rapidly eclipsed. As Eric Williams puts it, ‘the British colonies were thereafter forgotten.’³⁴⁴ In the context of hazard reduction, there is truth to William’s words; hurricanes and earthquakes did not cease in the Caribbean following the act of 1846 and yet while Britain invested in Indian resilience as shown by the 1898 incident such advances were not deployed in the Caribbean. When the Caribbean became less of a colonial priority (i.e. when it ceased to contribute to imperial coffers to the same extent), so any impetus to develop the region in respect to the natural hazards its people faced declined too.

Williams argued that Britain’s colonies went ‘forgotten until the Panama Canal reminded the world of their existence.’³⁴⁵ This observation acts as a useful framing device by which we can understand the singular occasion (in the period considered by this thesis) in

³⁴⁴ Williams, *Capitalism and Slavery*, p. 153.

³⁴⁵ *Ibid*, p. 153.

which Britain did pursue a costly but ultimately effective attempt to engineer one of its Caribbean colonies. The earthquake of 1907 completely destroyed Kingston precisely at the point when, as Williams puts it, colonial interests remembered the Caribbean colonies. Following the U.S.'s acquisition of the Panama Canal Company in 1904, there was a belief amongst commercial and colonial interests in Jamaica that it was within their grasp to make Kingston the de facto entrepot for trade in the region.³⁴⁶ Interest in Jamaica was also coming from cotton manufacturers in Lancashire who were enthusiastic about investing to further develop the island's agricultural industries.

The earthquake is supposed to have almost instantaneously killed the interest of those who were considering investing in the island, and the state in which Kingston was left did not allow it to function as the Caribbean's new trade hub.³⁴⁷ As Henry McNiel observed 'unless something striking is done to counteract the misconception, investments within the earthquake zone will for years be taboo'.³⁴⁸ Consequently, plans very quickly emerged from the West India Committee to rebuild Kingston 'on such scientific lines as would render it, as far as possible, immune from the effects of earthquakes, hurricanes, and fire.'³⁴⁹ The WIC combined this call with a request that some members of the Colonial Office attend a lecture given by John Milne on 'Construction of Buildings in Earthquake Countries'.³⁵⁰

Drawing on scientific expertise in a way that had not previously been done in the British Caribbean, Kingston was rebuilt in a manner that to the best of early twentieth century understanding was seismically resilient. Of the specific measures taken, the city's building law was amended to address concerns regarding construction material and to specify a

³⁴⁶ TNA, CO 137/661 (Jamaica) Letters from the Foreign Office (March to December 1907) and 'miscellaneous offices', Phillips to Elgin, 22 January, 1907.

³⁴⁷ TNA, CO 137/662 (Jamaica) Letters from individuals on matters relating Jamaica, McNiel to Elgin, 4 February, 1907.

³⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

³⁴⁹ *PP*, HoC [Cd.3560], p. 75, The West India Committee to the Colonial Office, 25 February, 1907.

³⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

minimum separation distance between buildings in the city to prevent the spread of fire as occurred during the one that had killed so many and consumed so much property. For the same reason laws were also passed for the widening of the city's streets.³⁵¹

The rebuilding of Kingston was successful enough that other colonies drew on the knowledge generated in 1907 to begin redesigning their towns. In 1933 following a devastating hurricane, the British Government in Belize contacted the Jamaican authorities to request the details of the rebuilding scheme that they considered 'most successful'.³⁵² The response to the earthquake of 1907 is striking when considered against the history of a lack of development of resilience methods in the British-controlled Caribbean. It appears as the first concerted attempt by the British to effectively engineer collective resilience in one of its Caribbean colonies. The question that emerges is why in 1907? Why not following the earthquake of 1843 or after the countless other hurricanes that hit the region in the nineteenth century? In 1882 there was certainly hope that Kingston would be rebuilt in a manner that might limit serious conflagrations after fire consumed a large part of the city in that year.³⁵³ However, given the scale of the fire in 1907, it can be said that this was not achieved.

3.5 Conclusion

This chapter has shown that the conceiving of and construction of resilience is not a twentieth century phenomenon. Finding ways to organise a society and engineer its built environment in ways that could potentially limit the damage of future hazard impacts had been a pattern of life in the hazard-prone regions of the Caribbean and South America from before their European 'discovery'. Furthermore, over the course of the nineteenth century we can see that

³⁵¹ JARD, IB/5/77/61, Earthquake reconstruction scheme, 14 February, 1907.

³⁵² JARD, IB/5/77/61, Minutes of Kingston Loan Board, 16 October, 1931.

³⁵³ NLJ, 'The Reconstruction of the City', *A paper read at a meeting of the Fire Relief Committee*, 20 December, 1882.

Britain worked to that end in India. In the Caribbean, until 1907 no British response – within the bounds of scientific knowledge of the period – was ever commensurate to the threat faced by the region’s hazards.

In 1907, it seems that future profit was truly threatened by the impact of a hazard for the first time. For a number of reasons, the Plantocracy, who had previously controlled the British Caribbean, appear to have acquiesced to doing little but simply weathering the hazards of the region. Primarily, as this chapter has demonstrated, they viewed the Caribbean not as a home but as a land to extract profit from, all the while trying to retain their British identity and not threaten that identity by engaging in wholesale adaptations to the environment. Why would they spend time engineering a more resilient society in what was as O’Shaughnessy puts it a ‘land of exile’? What is more, their wealth allowed for it. The storms, earthquakes and volcanic eruptions of the Caribbean were severe but they did not destroy the entire capacity to manufacture sugar every single year. For those who were not as wealthy, their infamous levels of indebtedness prevented them from focusing on anything but resuming the production of sugar, themes that will be explored in greater detail in chapter five which details long-term economic relief.

In 1907, the pressure to rebuild Kingston better was both internal and external. By 1907, Jamaica was home to an expanding middle class who no doubt felt that the island was home and, in contrast to plantocratic society, could express those feelings. In the first issue of the *Gleaner* (the island’s largest newspaper) following the earthquake, the pride some felt towards Kingston was clearly expressed and marked at least a rhetorical contrast to the legacy of underdevelopment left by Britain in the region: ‘we will build Kingston again, and, with God’s help, we will build it better.’³⁵⁴ Externally, Britain was keen to revive the fortunes of

³⁵⁴ *Gleaner*, ‘The Earthquake and the Future’, 19 January, 1907.

its Caribbean jewel. From the British perspective the Caribbean had long been in decline; the 1897 Royal Commission was the Secretary of State for the Colonies Joseph Chamberlain's first foray into trying to revive the region's revenues. In 1907 as part of this programme of revival, Britain was again keen to encourage investment in what was now the most important of its Caribbean possessions. Following the earthquake of 1907, Britain had to be seen to do something that would at least restore the confidence of potential investors. It appears that there was a belief that a new generation of people interested in investing in the Caribbean were not prepared to simply weather the region's hazards as the planters had done before them.

This chapter has shown that firstly, despite the vulnerability that it created, it was beyond the conception of those in control of the British Caribbean to mitigate the issues it created or limit its expansion. Throughout the nineteenth century profit remained at the core of British interests in the region. It appears that across this same period intensive agriculture remained the only way by which it was imagined large profits could be extracted from the region. What this chapter shows is that the narrow direction in which these colonies were 'developed' reflected the narrow vision of the plantocracy who controlled them. The plantocracy clearly did not see the region as their home and as such from them stemmed a legacy of underdevelopment that, in contrast to not only Britain and America but also India, left the region without and unable to construct any meaningful form of resilience to frequent hazards. As the communications show, after the 1898 hurricane Britain was left to play catch-up to America, despite them having only begun pushing for territorial acquisitions in the region four years prior. These trends reverse in 1907 only after the power of the plantocracy had waned and crucially when there was a need to attract a generation of investors in the region. Moreover, renewed interest in and a desire to build back Kingston better only came

about because there was now an opportunity to profit not wholly through agriculture but also through trade.

In the context of Wisner *et al*'s statement that disasters often 'deeply reflect failed or skewed development', understanding the issues outlined in this and chapter two are crucial to understanding the processes of response and relief to natural hazards.³⁵⁵ British control of the Caribbean was clearly deeply skewed its development in favour of a profit driven monoculture. The attachment to this mode of production, the relentless drive for profit but otherwise lack of attachment to the colonies as home meant that, as chapter four will show, relief was rarely more than an exercise in rebuilding the status quo.

³⁵⁵ Wisner, Gaillard, Kelman, 'Introduction to Part I', p. 11.

4 - Re-asserting control in the aftermath of disaster

Chapter two of this study established that the organisation of nineteenth century British Caribbean society made it more vulnerable to disaster. Chapter three established that these vulnerabilities, despite having been observed by contemporaries, remained unaddressed as to alter them would have meant altering the very basis of British control in the region. These facts are critical to understanding why, as chapters four and five will show, relief emerged in the form it did. However, these insights alone are not enough to fully understand the socio-political effects disaster had on British colonies in the region. To that end this chapter will also draw on two frameworks that have been used to analyse the socio-political effects of disaster.

One way in which sociologists have sought to engage critically with disaster is by seeking to ascertain whether it represents either a ‘critical juncture’ or an ‘accelerated status quo’.³⁵⁶ Disasters that create the circumstances in which pre-existing socio-political realities are permanently altered are seen as representative of the critical juncture; Vincent Gawronski and Richard Olson’s argument that the Guatemalan earthquake of 1976 set the government on a long path of repressive violence is a strong example of this.³⁵⁷ In *Shock Doctrine*, Naomi Klein exposes how the destruction wrought by hurricane Katrina was used as an opportunity to further extend corporate interests into the public sphere; a clear contemporary example of the accelerated status quo.³⁵⁸

This chapter shows that the concept of the critical juncture has limited explanatory value when examining the outcomes of disaster in the nineteenth century Caribbean.

Contrastingly, the concept of the accelerated status quo is applicable, but only to a small

³⁵⁶ Mark Pelling, *Adaptation to Climate Change: From Resilience to Transformation* (Routledge, 2010), p. 143.

³⁵⁷ Vincent T. Gawronski and Richard Stuart Olson, ‘Disasters as Crisis Triggers for Critical Junctures? The 1976 Guatemala Case’, *Latin American Politics and Society*, 55.2 (2013), p. 143.

³⁵⁸ Klein, *The Shock Doctrine*.

degree. In a number of cases the disruption to labour routines and thus the perceived threat to colonial control was met with a hardening of movement controls, a harshening of the punishments applied to the African-Caribbean population and in some cases the deployment of armed force. However, these developments were temporary and did not represent a new baseline of oppression for British Caribbean society. White elites wanted to consolidate the existing status quo, but the disruption occasioned by disaster meant that at times they felt they had to intensify their oppression of the African-Caribbean population to retain control. That said, not every case of disaster resulted in such an intensifying of oppression. At times, despite the stark inequalities of British Caribbean society, there was even co-operation between African-Caribbean peoples and white elites. In this respect, a development of the themes explored in the previous chapter can be seen; disasters were not something that changed this society, but something its inhabitants merely lived with.

This idea that disaster was simply lived with is also reflected in the limited explanatory value of the critical juncture concept. By the most obvious indicators, the potential for disaster to act as a trigger for a moment of critical juncture in which the pre-existing socio-political arrangements are contested appears strong in the British Caribbean. The intensely oppressed African-Caribbean population significantly outnumbered their white oppressors and insurrections and smaller conflicts were not uncommon in the region. Yet, as this chapter shows, across the long nineteenth century such a post-disaster contestation of white authority never took place. This chapter demonstrates that the immediate and later relief responses of the Plantocracy and the colonial authorities were primarily aimed at ensuring their control. These groups clearly perceived the disruption occasioned by disaster as a potential trigger for a contestation of their authority. Thus, disaster responses in this period do not represent an acceleration of the status quo but rather a consolidation of it.

Christian Pfister has argued that ‘the successful development of national relief efforts ... [is] intimately connected to the process of nation-building’.³⁵⁹ Chapter three showed that by no means were the British attempting to build nations in the region, over the nineteenth century the sustained extraction of profit remained the extent of their ambitions in the region. Consequently, when disaster disrupted the profit making infrastructure, relief emerged as an ad-hoc process in which white elites sought to maintain control over those who ensured their profit: the African-Caribbean population. This chapter will show that given the relative isolation of the Caribbean islands and the difficulty the African-Caribbean population faced when it came to providing for themselves – the plantation marginalised other crops and deforestation reduced the potential to forage – there was little choice but for them to engage with colonial relief. So focused on assuring their control, the Plantocracy and the colonial authorities were able to act effectively as the gatekeepers of relief. Thus, in the Caribbean, disasters and their aftermaths had to be simply survived, not used as an opportunity for the contestation of authority.

When it comes to considering the Plantocracy and colonial authorities’ immediate responses to disaster, Stuart Schwartz, David Lambert and Simon Smith have all touched upon it but it has never been their main focus.³⁶⁰ As it makes immediate responses to disaster its central focus, this chapter will remedy this lacuna. It examines not only the eruption of 1812 and the hurricane of 1831 (the events examined in the above works) but events that are as of yet unexamined such as the 1843 Antigua earthquake. Similar to the lack of attention afforded to the immediate responses of the Plantocracy and colonial officials, it was established in the literature review section of this thesis’ introductory chapter that disaster

³⁵⁹ Christian Pfister, ‘Learning from Nature-Induced Disasters: Theoretical Considerations and Case Studies from Western Europe’, in *Natural Disasters, Cultural Responses: Case Studies toward a Global Environmental History*, p. 27.

³⁶⁰ Schwartz, *Sea of Storms*; Simon Smith, ‘Volcanic Hazard in a Slave Society: The 1812 Eruption of Mount Soufrière in St Vincent’, *Journal of Historical Geography*, 30 (2010), pp. 55–67; Smith, ‘Storm Hazard and Slavery’; Lambert, *White Creole Culture, Politics and Identity during the age of Abolition*, pp. 177–184.

relief under the British Empire has received little attention and where it has research has focused on Ireland, India and famine, not the hazards considered in this thesis. In *Sea of Storms* Schwartz briefly touches upon relief after the 1831 hurricane but does not critically engage with what shaped that process and how it was organised and constructed.

The lack of in-depth engagement in British colonial relief practices in the Caribbean is reflected in wider works on the development of humanitarianism and aid giving. Barnett in *Empire of Humanity* comes closest to touching on the themes of this chapter. In regard to the British-controlled Caribbean, Barnett puts forth the idea that the anti-slavery movement is regarded by many as the beginning of humanitarianism for it was the first time ‘a large number of people became outraged, and stayed outraged for many years, over someone else’s rights. And most startling of all, the rights of people of another colour, on another continent.’³⁶¹ This, however, is a smaller section of a chapter which is otherwise largely devoted to missionaries and the intellectual thought underpinning the development of conceptions of humanitarianism.

This is not so much a critique of Barnett’s work but more an acknowledgement that his focus differs from this thesis and as such from a chapter that examines disaster and relief not only under the British Empire but under circumstances unique to the Caribbean: rapid-onset disasters in a starkly bifurcated society. That said, what Barnett’s chapter does that is particularly useful is draw a connection between the passing of the New Poor Law in 1834 and developments in colonial relief practices.³⁶² As Barnett puts it in regard to relief, ‘the British were caught in a paradox: they wanted to honour basic political economy practices that valorised the market but nevertheless felt compelled to consolidate their ideological

³⁶¹ Barnett, *Empire of Humanity*, p. 57.

³⁶² *Ibid*, p. 63.

position by adopting new methods of welfare provision.’³⁶³ Examining this paradox is central to the direction of this and the following chapter. Specifically, how did the British Empire provide relief to people who over the course of the century were considered racially lesser? And how did it provide relief within a wider cultural climate that saw needing relief as an individual failing which could largely be remedied by work? All the while, relief in some form had to be provided for the continued extraction of profit. This chapter is structured to reflect the timeline of response. It examines first how disaster was responded to in the hours after it occurred and later how, in the weeks that followed when damage and casualties had been ascertained, how more long term destitution was provided for. This chapter shows that across the nineteenth century, as a consequence of seeing these moments of flux as a threat to their control, the primary shaper of white elite responses to disaster was a desire to reassert their authority.

4.1 Controlling space and limiting movement

The Plantocracy and the colonial authorities’ immediate responses to disaster were almost always characterised by fear. In chapter three it was argued that the bifurcated nature of British Caribbean society played a role in precluding the development of societal resilience. In this chapter, that bifurcation plays a significant role in shaping the contours of responses to disaster. A survey of their actions and communications in disaster aftermaths over the nineteenth century show that white elites primarily saw hurricanes, earthquakes and eruptions as events that threatened their control of the majority African-Caribbean population. Disaster temporarily disrupted both the physical and mental controls that restricted the ability of African-Caribbean peoples to move freely. For example, rarely forbidden to leave the

³⁶³ Ibid, p. 63.

plantations where they were enslaved or later employed, disasters which so often destroyed these sites of labour (and as chapter two established triggered other epiphenomenal hazards) forced African-Caribbean peoples to leave in search of safety and food. Often the places they went in search of succour were urban centres, the very place white elites most feared large scale gatherings of the labouring class. Consequently, for the most part white elites responded to disaster in a manner that prioritised re-establishing controls over African-Caribbean movement ahead of relief, ultimately striving to re-assert the status quo as rapidly as possible.

The fear of an insurrection by African-Caribbean peoples or at the very least the potential for acts perceived as civil disobedience were a constant fear for white elites. On all British Caribbean colonies, African-Caribbean peoples - enslaved, free and later as wage labourers - formed the overwhelming majority of the population. A census taken in 1812 on the island of St Vincent prior to the volcanic eruption of that year provides a striking example of this disparity in population groupings: in March 1812 the white population totalled 827, the population of free people of colour 646 and the enslaved population totalled 22,020.³⁶⁴

Not least because of the conditions to which they subjected them, British fears of African-Caribbean insurrections or widespread disobedience were well founded. Rebellions of enslaved people were recurrent throughout the eighteenth century. Though not taking place on a British colony, the Haitian revolution is without doubt the most notable of the insurrections and its success certainly inspired deep worry in British planters.³⁶⁵ Of the most notable eighteenth-century uprisings against British control, the Jamaican maroons were the most successful as they effectively won a guerrilla conflict against the British that ended with the signing of a treaty that extended to them the right to autonomy if they did not offer aid to

³⁶⁴ TNA, MS. Nos. 206-253, CO 262/11 (St Vincent) Return of the population of the island of St Vincent, 10 March, 1812.

³⁶⁵ Christer Petley, 'Slaveholders and Revolution: The Jamaican Planter Class, British Imperial Politics, and the Ending of the Slave Trade, 1775-1807', *Slavery & Abolition*, 39.1 (2018).

other runaway enslaved peoples. Against the backdrop of these and other events Hilary Beckles suggests that British colonies functioned in permanent states of ‘acute social tension’.³⁶⁶

From the outset of British colonisation in the region, white elites developed several strategies to ensure control over the enslaved population as far as they could. First there was force; the Plantocracy and British colonial officials relied on both local militias and British troops (troops were mostly used in the eighteenth century when French and American military incursions were feared) to threaten and control the enslaved population.³⁶⁷ Second, there were strict rules about space. Plantations were largely rural enterprises so the movement of enslaved people was tightly controlled with a system of passes. An enslaved person had to have a pass, usually written by their owner, to be permitted to leave their plantation. That this system was intended to contain the potential for an insurrection is evident in the fact that it came into being on Barbados in 1688 as a response following a rebellion in 1675; there was need to create a ‘spatial buffer’ between estates.³⁶⁸

Of the many disruptions frequently created by disasters in the region, the physical and mental destruction of this spatial buffer is the one that excited white elites to the greatest degree. Other more informal rules such as those concerning access to a plantation owner’s house do not seem to have created such anxiety for white elites. On the plantation, white owners always strived to maintain some space, usually the great house, to separate themselves from those of the enslaved population that exclusively laboured in the cane fields. Yet at least in accounts from the hurricanes of 1831 and 1834 there are a number of instances in which plantation owners, peoples enslaved as domestic servants and field labourers were

³⁶⁶ Hilary McD Beckles, ‘Social and Political Control in the Slave Society’, in *General History of the Caribbean: The Slave Societies of the Caribbean*, ed. by Franklin W. Knight (London: UNESCO, 1997), p. 194.

³⁶⁷ Mulcahy, *Hurricanes and Society in the British Greater Caribbean*, p. 97.

³⁶⁸ Bonham C. Richardson, ‘Depression riots and the calling of the 1897 West India Royal Commission’, *New West Indian Guide*, 66:3/4 (1992), p. 187.

all forced to share ruined buildings in close proximity; episodes that passed without incident.³⁶⁹ Ultimately, in a concern shared by their counterparts throughout the region, the white elites appear to have been most concerned with preventing large-scale gatherings of the African-Caribbean population.

The pass system was for the most part effective at limiting gatherings in the rural environment. Indeed, as Hilary Beckles puts it '[the Plantocracy] achieved an impressive record of minority socio-political control'.³⁷⁰ However, where they had difficulty, and certainly experienced a greater deal of anxiety in regard to their ability to maintain control, was in the urban environment. At no point during the nineteenth century did the urban environment exceed the size of the rural in the British Caribbean, but this was the problem. Excluding Kingston, which had a large urban population, none of the British colonial capitals were designed to accommodate the full scope of the rural populations; they were for the most part small and, as chapter two showed particularly in the case of Bridgetown, Barbados, haphazardly laid out. Furthermore, in contrast to the plantation, living in or simply visiting the urban environment was empowering for the African-Caribbean population as it granted them a myriad of diverse new experiences.³⁷¹ These experiences engendered a new-found confidence that led many people to engage in low-level resistance against the colonial authorities; the African-Caribbean population was able to turn 'everyday activities into sites of resistance, ordinary space into theatres for action'.³⁷² Thus, white observers found themselves frustrated with the behaviour of enslaved peoples who lived in urban areas as they

³⁶⁹ Editor of the 'West Indian', *Account of the Fatal Hurricane*, pp. 57-58; TNA, T1/4397, Extract of letter from Rosalie Estate contained within Laidlaw to Gregg, 2 October, 1834.

³⁷⁰ Beckles, 'Social and Political Control in the Slave Society', p. 215.

³⁷¹ Pedro L.V. Welch, 'Post-Emancipation Adjustments in the Urban Context: Views from Bridgetown, Barbados' in *In the Shadow of the Plantation: Caribbean History and its Legacy*, ed. by Alvin O. Thompson (Jamaica: Ian Randle, 2002), p. 274.

³⁷² Sheller, 'Quasheba, Mother, Queen', p. 90.

were perceived as having a ‘proclivity for deviance and the violation of “received codes of deference”’.³⁷³

It is in this context, where disasters destroyed the plantations - the means of separating the African-Caribbean population - whilst that same population perceived the means for their survival (food and shelter) as existing in the urban environment that we must view the white elite’s immediate responses to disaster. Indeed, responses to the aftermath of the Barbadian hurricane of 1831 give us a clear example of how colonial fears of urban gatherings clashed with African-Caribbean people’s desire to seek aid in the colony’s capital. The hurricane of 1831 did exceptional damage to the island’s sugar infrastructure, destroying nearly all of the island’s plantations and leaving the enslaved population without shelter or food.³⁷⁴ Naturally, they began to leave the ruined plantations in search of both of these necessities. In response, the then Governor of Barbados James Lyon issued a proclamation four days after the hurricane that ordered all magistrates and constables to ‘exert themselves, to the utmost of their power, in preserving on this melancholy occasion the peace and tranquillity of the island’.³⁷⁵ The proclamation went on to state that should the civil authorities not be enough to maintain order then any number of the island’s militia were authorised to assemble to ‘prevent disturbances’ and preserve the general peace.³⁷⁶ It is important to note that although Barbadian legislature had previously temporarily allowed enslaved peoples to participate in the militia, at the beginning of the nineteenth century it was comprised entirely of freemen, and purposely excluded enslaved peoples.³⁷⁷ Lyon’s vaguely worded proclamation did not set limits on what actions could be taken by the militia and as

³⁷³ Beckles, ‘Social and Political Control in the Slave Society’, p. 197.

³⁷⁴ Editor of the ‘West Indian’, *Account of the Fatal Hurricane*, p. 104.

³⁷⁵ TNA, CO 28/107 (Barbados), Despatches from Sir James Lyon, Governor of Barbados, Proclamation issued 15 August, 1831.

³⁷⁶ *Ibid.*

³⁷⁷ Jerome S. Handler, ‘Freedmen and Slaves in the Barbados Militia’, *Journal of Caribbean History*, 19, (1984), p. 10.

such can be seen as a blank cheque to pursue whatever course they deemed necessary to preserve ‘order’.

To augment Lyon’s proclamation, the Justices of the Peace of Barbados were given the right to bestow the powers of special constable on anyone they deemed fit.³⁷⁸ Crucially, in more detailed coverage of the bill in the *Barbados Globe and Colonial Advocate*, it was revealed that the Governor granted full indemnity to any special constables and to any actions they might take in that role.³⁷⁹ The measures deployed in response to the 1831 hurricane broadened out who could enact punishments on enslaved peoples and effectively allowed for any action to be taken to restore the status-quo without legal consequence. The harshness of this response reflected a heightened fear of insurrection specific to Barbados. Only fifteen years earlier the so-called ‘Bussa’s Rebellion’ had shattered the once firm perception that as the colony with the largest white population, Barbados was safe from rebellion.³⁸⁰ Bussa’s rebellion also went against the conception the Barbadian Plantocracy had of their enslaved population who they had up to that point considered ‘non-violent’.³⁸¹ After Bussa’s rebellion, the state of Barbados’ society was fundamentally altered with its enslaved population perceived as ‘cherish[ing] feelings of deep revenge’ and as a consequence the Plantocracy were permanently worried that they held the island by ‘military strength only’.³⁸²

It is in this context that we can understand just why the initial responses to the disaster in 1831 were so directed to making sure white elites and their militia had the scope to act to ensure they could maintain control over the enslaved population. Over the week that followed

³⁷⁸ *Barbados Globe and Colonial Advocate*, 22 August, 1831.

³⁷⁹ *Ibid*, 23 August, 1831.

³⁸⁰ Hilary McD Beckles, ‘Emancipation by Law or War? Wilberforce and the 1816 Barbados Slave Rebellion’, in *Abolition and Its Aftermath: The Historical Context, 1790-1916*, ed. by David Richardson (London: Frank Cass), p. 80.

³⁸¹ *Ibid*, p. 82.

³⁸² Michael Craton, *Testing the Chains: Resistance to Slavery in the British West Indies* (Cornell University Press, 2009), p. 265.

the hurricane, further measures were taken that specifically sought to control the movement of the enslaved population. Five days after the hurricane, the *Barbados Globe and Colonial Advocate*'s front page set out the proclamation that all householders who owned slaves were required to collect them using any means and put them to work cleaning Bridgetown's streets.³⁸³ Otherwise, the act which was for 'the better preservation and welfare of this island' provided free reign to take any enslaved person, or anyone considered a vagrant (those no doubt wandering the island in search of shelter and food would be categorised as such), and put them to work at public works until they were picked up by an overseer or their owner.³⁸⁴

The Plantocracy's response to building abolitionist pressure to ameliorate the condition of the enslaved population was to allow a growing number of them the right to attend markets where they could sell their own produce.³⁸⁵ On Barbados, this was one part of an overall lessening of the controls on the movement of enslaved peoples, indeed the pass system itself had become more laxly enforced over the century and a half since it had been made law.³⁸⁶ In the aftermath of the hurricane in 1831 there was a clear attempt to reinstate white elite control of movement. The *Barbados Globe and Colonial Advocate* printed and then reprinted at intervals throughout August a notice stating that enslaved people designated as country slaves were to be imprisoned until their owner collected them if they were found outside of their estates.³⁸⁷

Whilst the actions taken by the colonial authorities in 1831 may have been harshened by the rebellions that had taken place in the decade and a half prior to the hurricane, it is of note that responses to disaster that occurred before 1831 followed similar patterns. The

³⁸³ *Barbados Globe and Colonial Advocate*, 18 August, 1831.

³⁸⁴ *Barbados Globe and Colonial Advocate*, 23 August, 1831.

³⁸⁵ Beckles, 'Social and Political Control in the Slave Society', p. 210.

³⁸⁶ Gwyn Campbell, Suzanne Miers, and Joseph Calder Miller, *Women and Slavery: The Modern Atlantic* (Ohio University Press, 2007), p. 173.

³⁸⁷ *Barbados Globe and Colonial Advocate*, 18 August, 1831; *Ibid*, 22 August, 1831.

responses to the conditions created by the eruption of 1812 are an early example of how these concerns play out in the aftermath of disaster. The eruption of St Vincent's *La Soufrière* volcano on 30 April 1812 began first with a rain of ash, which was then followed by magma flows. Crucially, many of the island's plantations were located on the fertile lands at its base. Consequently, for the enslaved population who were lucky enough to escape the rain of ash and heavy pumice as well as the later magma flows the island's capital Kingstown was an obvious point of refuge – many no doubt believing it would have the provisions that would be essential for their survival given the widespread destruction of crops.

In the case of 1812, though the sources do not allow for as detailed a picture as can be established in the case of 1831, but when considering remarks made by observers an image of a response that similarly emphasised the restoration of white control. As in 1831, the first action of St Vincent's authorities was to deploy the island's militia.³⁸⁸ Though there is no documentary evidence that records the actions taken by Wallace and his men in Kingstown, there is evidence that provides insight into the post-eruption state of Kingstown and thus the circumstances in which it was deemed necessary to deploy them. In the aftermath of the eruption, Hugh Perry Keane, a planter, wrote that Kingstown was 'in great confusion, after the later scenes'.³⁸⁹ From a letter written by Stuart Rothsey we know that at least 7000 enslaved people filled the town, which amounted to a near doubling of the entire population of the parish of Kingstown and they were all crammed into the capital.³⁹⁰ Colonial records also note the amount of people who went 'flying toward the town of Kingston'.³⁹¹

³⁸⁸ Virginia Historical Society, Keane Family Papers, Mss 1 K197 a23, Hugh Perry Keane, Diary, 2 May, 1812.

³⁸⁹ Ibid, 2-4 May.

³⁹⁰ Edinburgh, National Library of Scotland, Ms 6, 396, Stuart Rothsey Papers, Stuart Rothsey, 'Account of the Eruption at St Vincent in May 1812 [&] its effects on Barbadoes', pp. 141-143.

³⁹¹ TNA, CO 28/81 (St Vincent) Despatches from George Beckwith, Beckwith to the Earl of Liverpool, 9 May, 1812.

This can no doubt have caused consternation amongst the Plantocracy and colonial officials. Interestingly, as in 1831 when the scope for who could be made a special constable was widened, in the December of 1812 new laws were passed that in addition to making it a requirement that all militia be equipped with firearms also allowed the arming of white servants for the first time.³⁹² This act was passed seven months after the eruption of that year, but crucially this was – as chapter five will show in greater detail – very much a period in which the processes of relief were still ongoing. In this respect, it is hard not to see the passage of the act as in some way reflective of the experiences of colonial administrators earlier in that year.

4.2 Disaster as opportunity – the case of St Vincent’s Island Carib population in 1812 and 1902.³⁹³

When considering the responses of white elites to the eruption of 1812, it is especially worthwhile to specifically examine the actions directed towards the island’s Carib population. They further demonstrate the extent to which control was a prime shaping factor of immediate responses to disaster, but they also show a rare example of how those with no perceived value to colonial society were treated. The island of St Vincent was near unique in the nineteenth century British Caribbean in that it contained one of the few remaining remnants of the region’s indigenous population. This population now referred to as Island Caribs were known in the nineteenth century as Caribs; at least on St Vincent this population was subdivided further between ‘black’ Caribs and ‘yellow’ Caribs, black here referring to the offspring of ‘yellow’ (indigenous peoples) and escaped enslaved peoples. Crucially, this

³⁹² TNA, CO 262/11, ‘An act for arming the militia of the island of St Vincent’, 2 December, 1812.

³⁹³ The collective term Island Carib is used in this section of the chapter in place of the colonially designated ‘Carib’. It is acknowledged that the population once referred to as the ‘black Caribs’ now identify as the Garifuna. However, this part of the chapter examines the treatment of both ‘black’ and ‘yellow’ Caribs. Thus, the term ‘Island Caribs’ is used as this a more contemporary term used both historians and anthropologists.

population had always inhabited portions of land located partially on and around the slopes of the *La Soufrière* volcano. Consequently, in both 1812 and 1902 when the volcano erupted these populations who usually remained purposely isolated from the colonial Government and the plantations found themselves unwillingly having to engage with these authorities to ensure their survival. Despite these eruptions taking place ninety years apart there are interesting parallels to be drawn between the responses they received from the colonial authorities. Ahead of even the enslaved this exceedingly small group received a distinctly negative response that revealed a willingness on the part of the colonial authorities to exploit their vulnerability.

Even prior to 1812, St Vincent's Island Carib population were viewed very negatively by the British colonial authorities on the island for their long history of resistance.³⁹⁴ They fought the British throughout the eighteenth century, but crucially in 1773 and 1795, they actually fought with and were armed by the French.³⁹⁵ The conflict of 1795 was alone said to have cost British proprietors a third of the value of their estates and definitely left the British with deep animosity towards the Island Caribs. In 1797 they were subdued through conflict and a treaty was signed between the two groups, a portion of the Island Carib population were deported to Ruattan in Honduras and a portion of St Vincent's land was given to the remainder.³⁹⁶ In 1812, like anyone in the rural northern parishes of St Vincent, the remainder of the Island Carib population was forced to flee to Kingstown when their homes and their possessions were destroyed by the eruption.³⁹⁷

³⁹⁴ Patrick Colquhoun, *A Treatise on the Wealth, Power, and Resources of the British Empire: The Rise and Progress of the Funding System Explained: with Observations on the National Resources for the Beneficial Employment of a Redundant Population, and for Rewarding the Military and Naval Officers, Soldiers and Seamen for Their Services to Their Country During the Late War* (J. Mawman, 1814), p. 558.

³⁹⁵ *Ibid*, p. 558; A.C. Carmichael, *Tales of a Grandmother* (London: Richard Bentley, 1841), p. 141.

³⁹⁶ Martin, *History of the West Indies*, p.227.

³⁹⁷ TNA, CO 260/29 (St Vincent) Correspondence, Original – Secretary of State, Paul to Earl of Liverpool, 16 May, 1812.

As has already been discussed, there does not appear to have been a defined and organised relief effort taking place on St Vincent. Though they joined the mass of people seeking relief in Kingstown, the Island Caribs were quickly separated out from the enslaved, receiving special attention because they were in a unique position regarding relief. Unlike the enslaved, whose places of work were also where they lived and so restoring their homes went hand in hand with rendering the plantations profitable again, the Island Carib provided no labour to the planters. In that sense, from the colonial perspective there was little incentive to provide them with relief, and furthermore, in their greatly reduced number they did not present the same threat of violence as an un-fed enslaved population. Robert Paul, a planter and President of St Vincent's legislative council, decided to advocate on their behalf at the meetings that followed the eruption.³⁹⁸ The legislature told Paul they could not supply relief to the Island Caribs because their own losses were too great, Paul went above them and wrote directly to the Earl of Liverpool requesting relief for the 'Charaibs' who were 'without residence', but assured him that he would not 'incur any expense that is profitable to avoid'.³⁹⁹

The scheme that eventually emerged for the Island Carib was one in which they were to immigrate to the district of Toco on the island of Trinidad, on which they 'must depend entirely on their own industry' because St Vincent could not afford to provide for them.⁴⁰⁰ The Governor 'acquiesced' to Mr Paul's demands for the Island Caribs and told him he could take the measures that he felt were the most 'expedient' for their first few months.⁴⁰¹ It is not exactly clear why Paul became an advocate for the Island Caribs when the other members of St Vincent's legislative council were clearly disinterested. The lands they

³⁹⁸ Hamilton, *Scotland, the Caribbean and the Atlantic World*, p. 87.

³⁹⁹ TNA, CO 260/29, Paul to the Earl of Liverpool, undated, 1812.

⁴⁰⁰ TNA, CO 263/4, St Vincent, Privy Council Meeting, 8 July, 1812; *Ibid*, 3 August, 1812.

⁴⁰¹ TNA, CO 263/4, St Vincent, Privy Council Meeting, 3 August, 1812.

inhabited by *La Soufrière* had long been regarded as some of the most fertile on the island, no doubt because of the rain shadow created by *La Soufrière*.⁴⁰² Consequently, one could argue that the scheme he proposed that removed a portion of the Island Caribs was done to take possession of their lands. However, Paul owned land in St George's Parish on the other side of the island, so the Island Carib lands were not an obvious place for expansion.⁴⁰³ Perhaps given the destruction of their provision grounds – a point communiques stressed with a frequency similar to that with which they addressed the enslaved population's provision grounds – there was a fear that the Island Caribs would be long-term dependants on the colonial government or that, given the history of violence, this might lead to conflict between the two groups.

There is debate about who suggested the scheme in the first place with Simon Smith suggesting that it was Baptiste, the Island Carib leader, who petitioned for the right to emigrate.⁴⁰⁴ However, it does appear more likely that Paul suggested the scheme to adhere to the rubric of limiting 'any expense it was profitable to avoid'. Indeed, this is backed up by the fact that eighty eight Island Caribs refused to travel to Trinidad; it is worth considering whether this would have happened if their leader had been the one to suggest the scheme.⁴⁰⁵

What is of interest is that as a consequence of this partial refusal, the Government of St Vincent 'sincerely lamented that the scheme of taking the Yellow Charibs to Trinidad could not be expanded to the entire population of Caribs on St Vincent. As they must ever view us with a degree of resentment'.⁴⁰⁶ Clearly, this scheme was viewed as the most effective way

⁴⁰² Martin, *History of the West Indies*, p. 225;

Rose-Ann J. Smith, 'Multiple Stresses in a Globalized World: Livelihood Vulnerability Amongst Carib Communities in Northeastern St Vincent,' in *Globalization, Agriculture and Food in the Caribbean: Climate Change, Gender and Geography*, eds. Clinton L. Beckford and Kevon Rhiney (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), p. 176.

⁴⁰³ *Laws of St Vincent*, (Edward Stanford: London, 1864), p. 21.

⁴⁰⁴ Smith, 'Volcanic Hazard in a Slave Society', p. 64.

⁴⁰⁵ TNA, CO 263/4, St Vincent, Privy Council Meeting, 3 August, 1812.

⁴⁰⁶ TNA, CO 263/4, St Vincent, Privy Council Meeting, 16 September, 1812.

to get rid of a population that contributed nothing to the island's economy and one that for a period after 1812 would remain entirely dependent on government relief. The enslaved population by contrast could of course be set back to work reconstructing the plantations. In effect, we can see a very different form of treatment extended to the Island Caribs sufferers than was extended to the enslaved population. Where the legislative council sought food from neighbouring Barbados specifically for the latter, the former was denied assistance. The priorities of St Vincent's planter class were clear: the enslaved population were valuable both as property and labourer hence their treatment. For the Island Caribs remaining on the island, it was clear that the government, even in their further reduced numbers, viewed them with suspicion; a collective statement from the Privy Council read 'We beg leave to add that they may be the means at some future period of carrying on a dangerous intercourse with the Enemy [the French] and any disaffected slaves in the colony'.⁴⁰⁷

In 1902, when St Vincent's *La Soufrière* had its next major eruption, the Island Carib population were again subjected to harsh treatment. Despite the span of time separating the events, St Vincent's colonial governance were again determined to use the destruction of Island Carib property as an opportunity to repossess their land. As this chapter will later show, the relief effort on St Vincent in 1902 handled by Governor Llewelyn was particularly punitive. His actions received a number of complaints, some of which specifically addressed his treatment of the Island Caribs. In 1902, the Island Carib villages of Owia and Fancy, located as they were in 1812 directly in the path of *La Soufrière's* lava flow, were completely destroyed in the eruption. The Caribs who survived were provided with six months shelter in what described as two 'cramped' buildings in St Vincent's capital Kingstown.⁴⁰⁸ During this time, despite public complaints, Llewelyn used relief funds to re-purchase lands around the

⁴⁰⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁰⁸ TNA, CO 321/218 (St Vincent) Despatches from Governor R B Llewelyn, St Vincent, Protest by the unofficial members of the legislative council of St Vincent, 29 January, 1903.

base of *La Soufrière* including those of the Owia and Fancy Caribs.⁴⁰⁹ The Island Caribs, who otherwise lacked the ability to write, were helped to resist Llewelyn's actions by two Wesleyan ministers J.H. Darrell and T. Huckerby. They wrote a public petition against the treatment signed by the Island Caribs and in response Llewelyn struck them from all doles and relief funds.⁴¹⁰

Llewelyn's motives for enacting such treatment become clear in his private correspondence. The land at the centre of the Carib villages had always been considered an ideal location for a central sugar factory.⁴¹¹ As in 1812, disaster again provided an opportunity. Llewelyn posited to Chamberlain that there was no point in returning the land in question back to its pre-eruption state, where sugar was manufactured in a 'primitive manner'.⁴¹² Llewelyn, determined to re-invigorate the dormant plans for a central factory and to use this opportunity to do so, even went as far as refusing financial support to planters who also had land bordering on the Carib territory.⁴¹³

The other factor that had a role in engendering the particularly punitive treatment directed toward the Island Carib population was their refusal to emigrate. Like in 1812, the emigration of the Island Caribs lessened both the immediate burden of charity on the government and specifically in 1902 was seen as an easy solution to employment shortages. Llewelyn's private correspondence reveals that in 1902 he had been in communication with Augustus Hemming, Governor of Jamaica, and representatives of the United Fruit Company to have at least three hundred labourers (including the Island Caribs) emigrate to its Jamaican banana

⁴⁰⁹ Ibid.

⁴¹⁰ TNA, CO 321/218, 'To the King's Most Excellent Majesty', a petition of the Carib peoples of the villages of Owia and Fancy, 12 January, 1903.

⁴¹¹ TNA, CO 28/257 (Barbados) Despatches from Sir Frederic Mitchell Hodgson, governor of Barbados, Llewelyn to Chamberlain, 5 January, 1902.

⁴¹² Ibid.

⁴¹³ TNA, CO 321/218, Llewelyn to Chamberlain, 5 January, 1902.

plantations.⁴¹⁴ Despite being initially conducted in private, this discussion appears to have reached Darrell who argued that the fact that Llewelyn was prepared to send his own labourers to work as indentured servants for a U.S. company showed his deep commitment to ‘escap[ing]...responsibility to the peasant class’.⁴¹⁵

Though these two eruptions took place ninety years apart, the similarities in how the Island Carib population were treated reveals a willingness on the part of the colonial state to exploit disaster rendering a population reliant on colonial relief. In this case specifically, it shows a transactional side of British disaster response; those who had different relations with the colonial state received different forms of ‘relief’. As in 1812, the Island Carib of 1902 did not contribute to colonial coffers in the same manner as the African-Caribbean population of St Vincent who paid rents to plantation owners. Though it was also harsh and punitive, the relief, both in and after the period of slavery, represented to some degree a balancing act for the colonial government. They remained committed to making sure the colonial hierarchy was fully stable post disaster but they also had to provide some relief to avoid civil unrest, to maintain relations in the long run and most importantly to restart the plantations. None of these criteria were applicable to the Island Carib people, so there was little need to balance anything. In both 1812 and 1902 the colonial authorities simply focused on removing them and in 1902 did so specifically to further their own developmental goals as established in the 1897 Royal Commission Report.

There are some similarities in the treatment the colonial state directed toward the Island Carib of St Vincent and the African-Caribbean population. Namely, the state’s aforementioned desire to exploit newly created dependence in manner that benefitted it. That

⁴¹⁴ *PP*, HoC [Cd.1201], p. 34, Chamberlain to Llewelyn, 23 May, 1902; *PP*, HoC [Cd.1201], p. 75, Hemming to Chamberlain, 12 June, 1902.

⁴¹⁵ TNA, CO 321/218, Darrell, ‘Open letter to His Excellency Sir R.B. Llewelyn, K.C.M.G’, 2 January, 1903.

said, neither in 1812 or in 1902 were white elites exercised to any degree about civil disobedience from the Island Carib population, such fears were exclusively directed toward the African-Caribbean population. However, it is important to note that it was not always the case that when one of the region's natural hazards hit a colony, legislation was passed to increase the punishments for those who looted and transgressed rules about space. On Dominica in 1834, although there was mention of looting taking place following a hurricane that hit the island in September of that year, no acts were passed that either mandated the use of force or harshened punishments. Instead, looting was mentioned but it was done so to highlight how close the planters thought they were to a breakdown of societal order and thus give greater weight to the island's request for Parliamentary relief.⁴¹⁶ In the case of the 1847 Tobago hurricane we can see that similarly even when the movement of the African-Caribbean population did not pose a threat worth legislating against, the perceived threat of looting often still did. In 1847, three days after the hurricane Governor Reid passed an act that threatened those caught looting with up to 39 public lashes.⁴¹⁷ The proclamation that accompanied this act stressed that this act would definitely be applied to those caught stealing lumber – just one example of how the shortages caused by the plantation caused further friction in disaster aftermaths.

Overall, the absence of formalised controls over the movement of the African-Caribbean population in 1834 and 1847 appear as exceptions. In contrast, concerns regarding African-Caribbean transgressions of space appear to have remained at the forefront of immediate responses to disaster later into the nineteenth century. Following the hurricane of 1898, Governor Moloney expressed frustration at the fact that the labouring population had gathered in urban centres on the affected islands. Consequently, Moloney focused his

⁴¹⁶ TNA, T1/4397, Colquhoun to Rice, 12 November, 1834.

⁴¹⁷ SOAS, Incoming correspondence. Tobago/Box 1, Reid to Grey, 14 October, 1847.

energies on trying to return the African-Caribbean population to their now wrecked homes.⁴¹⁸ Similarly frustrated, in 1902, following the eruption on St Vincent, Governor Llewelyn not only deployed the island's militia specifically to stop urban gatherings, but later upon communicating the problem he felt they posed was given money by the Colonial Office to extend this course of action.⁴¹⁹

That throughout the nineteenth century white elites used force and legislative adaptations to widen the scope with which whites could punish African-Caribbean peoples is indicative of the anxiety that disaster provoked in them. In the examples considered thus far, disaster threatened colonial control in largely rural colonies, where preventing gatherings and limiting the chance for perceived civil unrest was solved by getting people out of urban areas and returning them to rural ones. The damage wrought by the earthquake that hit Jamaica in 1907 centred on Kingston and as such is the only truly urban disaster that occurred in the region in the period this thesis studies. Consequently, responding to it presented a unique challenge to informal colonial rules around movement and to anxieties around the preservation of 'order' and property. The 1907 earthquake thus represents the example in which we can most clearly see the motivations underpinning the immediate responses of the colonial authorities to disaster.

From the outset, ahead of providing aid to Kingston's citizens, Governor Alexander Swettenham sought to direct the efforts of the colonial authorities towards re-consolidating control over the urban environment. The fact that his first order was for the deployment of four hundred troops from the WIR, augmented by police officers from around the island, is

⁴¹⁸ *PP*, HoC [C.9205], West Indies. Correspondence, p. 43, Admiralty to Colonial Office, 20 October, 1898; *PP*, HoC [C.9205], West Indies. Correspondence, p.3, Moloney to Chamberlin, 16 September, 1898.

⁴¹⁹ TNA, CO 321/218, 'Protest by the unofficial members of the legislative council of St Vincent', 29 January, 1903.

an unequivocal demonstration of his intent.⁴²⁰ This ad-hoc grouping was armed with bayoneted rifles, live ammunition and was ordered to guard buildings of value to the colonial authorities and to preventing looting and other disruptions to the 'social order'.⁴²¹ Though the looting was largely limited to 'large sacks of rice carried away on the heads of women', for all intents and purposes Kingston was placed 'practically under martial law'.⁴²² Thus Swettenham effectively left Kingston's population to fend for itself, a move that caused many more casualties as disorientated citizens died attempting to help each other.⁴²³

In everyday life, the colonial authorities viewed the city's African-Caribbean population with a high level of racialised distrust, yet the WIR presence, and with a mandate to shoot Kingston's citizens, was not a daily occurrence. In this respect it can be seen that this disaster, like the many that went before it, created a climate that elevated existing tensions, albeit not permanently. The earthquake destroyed the physical manifestations of colonial control. The police stations that would normally respond to unrest had been demolished, as were the closest barracks.⁴²⁴ In any context these buildings would have been seen as essential to safeguarding societal order; they had a heightened value in the post-emancipation urban Caribbean.⁴²⁵

In Jamaica during the era of slavery, there had been no police force and it was only after emancipation that one came into being with a specific mandate to preserve order in the now racially integrated urban environment.⁴²⁶ Despite this development, the post-

⁴²⁰ TNA, CO 884/9 (Jamaica) Colonial Office: Jamaica: Correspondence respecting Imperial aid to the West Indies, Swettenham to Grey, 14 February, 1907.

⁴²¹ *PP*, HoC [Cd.3560], p.27, Swettenham to Grey, 17 January, 1907.

⁴²² *Ibid*, p. 112; JARD, E. A. Hodges, 'The Secret History of the Earthquake'.

⁴²³ University of Pittsburgh, Darlington Autograph Files, 1610-1914, DAR.1925.07, Box 4, Folder 60, Aulay Babington Macaulay, 'Account of Jamaican earthquake' 14 January, 1907, pp.6-7, accessed on line, <<https://digital.library.pitt.edu/islandora/object/pitt%3A31735060247966/viewer#page/1/mode/2up>>.

⁴²⁴ *PP*, HoC [Cd.3560], p.30, General, Jamaica to Secretary of State for War, 18 January, 1907.

⁴²⁵ Howard Johnson, 'Patterns of Policing in the Post-Emancipation British Caribbean, 1835-95', in *Policing the Empire: Government, Authority, and Control, 1830-1940*, ed. by David M. Anderson and David Killingray (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1991), p. 77.

⁴²⁶ *Ibid*, p. 76.

emancipation era was still marked by low-level resistance, riots and even large-scale active resistance (of which the Morant Bay Rebellion of 1865 was a particular nadir for the white minority in the Caribbean). Contemporary literature such as Froude's *The English in the West Indies* exacerbated these ever-present fears. Froude purposely made repeated references to the rebellion to support his view that violence would be the only result if colonial control slipped or non-whites were granted any modicum of political autonomy.⁴²⁷

Neither these patterns of resistance nor the fears of white elites had changed by 1907. In fact, in recent memory for those in Kingston were the Port of Spain riots of 1903, a very similar example of violent urban unrest against colonial authorities.⁴²⁸ In 1903, long-held discontent over increased water rates turned into violent protest outside Trinidad's parliament and resulted in the building being burnt to the ground.⁴²⁹ Beyond a demonstration of the potential power of urban civil unrest, the example of the 1903 riots provides a comparative insight that aids in contextualising the actions of Jamaica's authorities in 1907. The violence that erupted in 1903 was only suppressed with the arrival of British naval reinforcements.⁴³⁰ Following a refocusing of British international priorities, there had been a complete withdrawal of the Royal Navy from the region in 1905.⁴³¹ That in 1907 Swettenham found himself without access to naval reinforcements can have only intensified his desire to rapidly secure Kingston's urban environment.

The post-emancipation urban environment was clearly something both regional governance and the Colonial Office viewed with significant trepidation and this largely explains why in 1907, Swettenham was motivated to re-consolidate control over it ahead of

⁴²⁷ Richardson, *Igniting the Caribbean's Past*, p. 81; Matthew J. Smith, *Liberty, Fraternity, Exile: Haiti and Jamaica after Emancipation* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2014), p. 190.

⁴²⁸ Richardson, *Igniting the Caribbean's Past*, p. 158.

⁴²⁹ *Ibid.*, p.158.

⁴³⁰ *Ibid.*, p.176.

⁴³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 189.

organising any relief effort. However, there were factors unique to 1907 even beyond British naval withdrawal that even further magnified Swettenham's fears. The WIR regiment itself presented a problem. The issue, also raised by the WIC, was that the WIR had very few white troops.⁴³² The racial composition of Caribbean regiments had been a great cause for concern among colonial authorities who had long feared that African-Caribbean troops would cease to be loyal when directed to put down public unrest.⁴³³ Indeed, first-hand accounts are quick to point to any indiscretion in the WIR. For example, C.L. Chenery described seeing a group of WIR troops overlooking looting, something he attributed to a lack of a white commanding officer.⁴³⁴

With the priorities of Swettenham and the colonial authorities resolutely focused away from providing relief, much of the population fled to the city's open spaces. Displaying a characteristic level of callousness, Swettenham, despite recurrent aftershocks and the continuing fire, attempted to order Kingston's population back to their ruined homes.⁴³⁵ Unlike Governor Moloney who in 1898 had been able to send labourers back to rural areas, Swettenham had nowhere else to send the population. Consequently, his efforts to remove them failed and in fact a report by a senior naval officer, E.E. Chown, disputes this attempt even took place. Chown suggested from the outset that one of the Government's primary aims was to get Kingston's citizens out of the dangerous ruins of the city.⁴³⁶ The contradiction constituted by Chown's report either suggests that there was miscommunication between Swettenham and his subordinates or that the report was attempting to cover up Swettenham's clear indifference to the suffering of Kingston's population.

⁴³² *PP*, HoC [Cd. 3560], p.45, West India Committee to Colonial Office, 11 February, 1907.

⁴³³ Johnson, 'Patterns of Policing in the Post-Emancipation British Caribbean', p. 78.

⁴³⁴ C.L. Chenery, 'The Jamaican Earthquake.', reprinted from the *Barbados Advocate*, 23, 24, 25 January, 1907, p.18.

⁴³⁵ *PP*, HoC [Cd. 3560], p.115, Report on Earthquake in Jamaica (Kingston and Port Royal) also Relief Measures, 7 April, 1907.

⁴³⁶ *PP*, HoC [Cd. 3560], p.97, Admiralty to Colonial Office, 26 February, 1907.

The WIR had originally been sent into Kingston to protect property and alleviate colonial fears about social unrest. Every subsequent action they took only furthered colonial control over Kingston. The WIR began cordoning off certain areas of Kingston. The first area was the valuable commercial district, which was sealed off after the institution of a system of passes. A first-hand account from Aulay Babington Macaulay, a senior officer on the RMS *Arno* docked in Kingston, suggests the system came into being to prevent further crowding after armed guards were used to break up large crowds attempting to access the wharf.⁴³⁷ It is heavily implied in Macaulay's account that this was a move to further racial separation. Macaulay, himself a white, senior officer had a pass, whilst those in the crowd he refers to evidently do not.

Throughout Macaulay's account he talks of Kingston's non-white population in a generic manner, referring to them as 'crowds' for example.⁴³⁸ By contrast, members of Kingston's white population he encountered are largely referred to by name. Acknowledging the racial distinction in Macaulay's account makes it possible to discern the other areas in Kingston over which the colonial authorities prioritised re-consolidating their control. In his description of visiting Kingston's hospital, Macaulay witnessed an 'excited crowd' outside its gates who were prevented from progressing further by armed guards stationed there.⁴³⁹ Macaulay's use of 'crowd' implicitly suggests that a certain type of people, the same people whom guards were being used elsewhere to control, were purposely denied access to the hospital. In the week that followed the earthquake, when civil unrest had not occurred the Relief Committee still negotiated with the Jamaican railway company to allow free transport

⁴³⁷ Aulay Babington Macaulay, 'Account of Jamaican earthquake' 14 January, 1907, pp. 18-19.

⁴³⁸ Ibid.

⁴³⁹ Ibid, p.15.

of sufferers out of Kingston to lessen crowding and the number of those dependant on charity.⁴⁴⁰

4.3 Maintaining the separation of the classes

This chapter has so far demonstrated the extent to which controlling the African-Caribbean population's access to certain spaces and their movement, especially in urban areas, was the immediate priority for white elites in the aftermath of disaster. As shown in the examples of 1831 and 1834, there were points at which planters were forced to share shelter with enslaved peoples and apprentices out of necessity, but that these passed without issue. It was specifically gatherings of the African-Caribbean population that white elites sought to prevent as these presented a threat to their control. However, even when labour relations under slavery and apprenticeship ensured a fixed separation between the hierarchical position of the planter and the African-Caribbean at times disaster relief mandated an extra layer of separation. This extra layer of separation was something often achieved through the use of the church.

In 1831, the church played a significant auxiliary role in the 'relief' efforts constructed by the colonial authorities. Barbados' Bishop was called upon to chair a relief committee. Local churches then took account of the deaths and ascertained the losses of property in each parish.⁴⁴¹ Church buildings, where they survived, reverted to their ancient purpose and provided both shelter and the cover for makeshift hospitals.⁴⁴² The women of the

⁴⁴⁰ *PP*, HoC [Cd. 3560], p. 97, Admiralty to Colonial Office, 26 February, 1907.

⁴⁴¹ *PP*, HoC [197], p. 3, Lyon to Goderich, 30 August, 1831.

⁴⁴² Editor of the 'West Indian', *Account of the Fatal Hurricane*, p. 144.

Barbados ladies' association used the capital Bridgetown's church to construct a soup kitchen.⁴⁴³

This almost innate response to crisis built into British religious culture formed a significant and effective part of Barbados' recovery. In Britain, the parish had, since the Elizabethan period, been the primary place through which pauper doles had been distributed and as such in times of distress such as when there was a crop dearth it was also the place in which people gathered to receive relief.

This system was informally transplanted to the Caribbean with the advent of British colonisation in the region. For example, in St Andrews parish the author of the *Account* states that the minister provided shelter to the 'distressed poor of the parish, whose every little want was...attended'.⁴⁴⁴ Though it is impossible to definitively say who was receiving this care, it is not too much of a stretch to suggest that this shelter and care was only extended to Barbados' white population.⁴⁴⁵ In the Caribbean, slave owners were too powerful for Church of England officials in Britain to enforce their authority over the islands. This created a vacuum that was quickly filled by lay elites: the very same people who owned the plantations and slaves. Consequently, for the Plantocracy the Church of England came to act as a crucial 'hegemonic instrument'.⁴⁴⁶ It was an instrument that was used to further the maintenance of the belief in a 'fundamental, ontological difference' between the planters and the enslaved that was so essential to maintaining the inequality of slavery.⁴⁴⁷ If the power of the Plantocracy rested on this ontological separation, why would the Church expend energy to provide care to the slaves, as equal care would have only undermined this separation? In this

⁴⁴³ Ibid, p. 144.

⁴⁴⁴ Ibid, p. 129.

⁴⁴⁵ Ibid, p. 129.

⁴⁴⁶ Rowan Strong, *Anglicanism and the British Empire, c.1700-1850* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), p. 239.

⁴⁴⁷ Ibid.

context it appears difficult to argue that it can have been anyone but Barbados' white population having their every want attended to.

This is not to say that outside of the sphere of the Church there were no calls for the maintenance of the general welfare of all those on Barbados in 1831, it is just that these calls were still framed in a manner that appealed on the basis of their inherent value for the white population. In a sense, the welfare of the enslaved population became a priority only when ignoring it threatened white security. For example, post-hurricane food shortages had always been a threat; after the 1780 hurricane, at least 1000 enslaved people had perished as a result of starvation.⁴⁴⁸ Yet a call for action in 1831 to avert a similar disaster was predicated not on the need to save the lives of the enslaved but because as the *St Lucia Gazette* put it 'a white complexion will afford no shield' against the effects of famine and disease.⁴⁴⁹

Across the nineteenth century the church appears to have played a varying role in relief efforts. In 1834 on Dominica, the Rector of St George's in Roseau called on the Governor to ensure the survival of the daily meal society even in the context of the strain the poverty occasioned by the hurricane would place on it:

About six months since I formed, with much doubtfulness of its success, a daily meal society on the Antigua plan. I have reason to be thankful that I did too. It has answered wonderfully, given general satisfaction. We feed at present forty two persons everyday, and give relief to many sick. The distress caused by the hurricane necessarily diminish our list of subscribers [and] increase that of our applicants, but we still have little funds in

⁴⁴⁸ Samuel Hyde (ed.), *A General Account of the Calamities Occasioned by the Late Tremendous Hurricanes and Earthquakes in the West-India Islands, Foreign as Well as Domestic: Also a List of the Committee Appointed to Manage the Subscriptions Carefully Collated from Authentic Papers, by Mr. Fowler* (J. Stockdale, and W. Richardson, 1781), p. 42.

⁴⁴⁹ *St Lucia Gazette*, 17 August, 1831.

hand. I took up with confidence that in god that our “charitable association” as I’ve called it will be fully supported.⁴⁵⁰

In the context of the punitive relief so frequently constructed by colonial authorities the responses of the churches of the Caribbean to some degree often provided a more humane counterbalance. Yet, later in the nineteenth century, after slavery, the church was often used as a point from which to distribute relief but in an exclusionary manner that solely benefitted the elites of a colony.

At the end of the nineteenth century whilst whites still held deeply racist attitudes, the end of slavery weakened the physical barriers they were able to place between themselves and the African-Caribbean population. Consequently, in this period, to remedy this urban centres in the Caribbean colonies had many white-only spaces such as hotels and clubs and this development was reflected in the construction of relief. In 1898, this desire to maintain white-only spaces is clear. Governor Moloney allotted £400 for private distribution through parishes to those of a ‘better class’ than those who ‘resorted’ to relief in Barbados’ urban centres.⁴⁵¹ This money was intended for people who by virtue of their station were unwilling to receive relief at the urban centres because of the ‘motley crowd’ gathered there.⁴⁵² In 1898, all classes were to a degree affected by the hurricane and therefore in need of relief, yet this equal need for relief posed a threat to the illusion of superiority that whites sought to maintain in the wage labour era. In the context of the widely held view that needing relief reflected personal failings the separation of relief stations was therefore integral to avoiding white elites appearing publically reliant on the authorities for succour.

⁴⁵⁰ TNA, T1/4397, Extract of a letter sent by Rev George Clarke to (recipient not given), 20 September, 1834.

⁴⁵¹ *PP*, HoC [Cd.9205], p. 64, Moloney to Chamberlain, 25 November, 1898.

⁴⁵² *Ibid.*

In 1907 when the racially mixed urban environment of Kingston made the maintenance of this separation harder, the separation of the classes during the relief process is even more striking. In the days following the earthquake Governor Swettenham found himself unable to remove the African-Caribbean population from Kingston's racecourse. This created a problem because as the largest section of open ground in the city's limits, as a consequence of the risk of further building collapses, it was the most logical place for the city's inhabitants to take up temporary residence. Thus, the racecourse was soon inhabited by both African-Caribbean and white people. In particular, these included many rich white people who prior to the earthquake had been able to maintain a partial separation from the African-Caribbean population in certain spaces such as the city's many white-only hotels.

On 22 January, tents intended as temporary shelters had arrived from Trinidad and British Bermuda on the HMS *Indefatigable*.⁴⁵³ Initially, these tents had been freely distributed between the sufferers on the racecourse, who at this point had been without shelter for a week. Archbishop Enos Nuttall's first action as head of the colonial relief committee was to recall these tents. He saw them as having been distributed 'indiscriminately', and he sought to reconstitute them into a camp for 'a better class of people'.⁴⁵⁴ Not only do Nuttall's actions suggest that he had a preconceived idea of who was deserving of aid, they also represent a clear attempt to recreate a racially segregated space where the earthquake had destroyed it. Those in the exclusive camp not only had well-constructed shelter, but in direct contrast to the majority of Kingston's population had access to running water and even the luxury of electricity.⁴⁵⁵ However, most telling about the motivations that had driven the

⁴⁵³ *PP*, HoC [Cd.3560], p. 27, Swettenham to Grey, 17 January, 1907.

⁴⁵⁴ *PP*, HoC [Cd.3560], p. 115, Admiralty to Colonial Office, 7 April, 1907.

⁴⁵⁵ *Ibid*.

construction of the camp is the fact that it was guarded by WIR troops for the ‘maintenance of privacy’.⁴⁵⁶

The racecourse camp not only separated out this ‘better class of people’, but the fact it was private meant that, like in 1898, it stopped those inside from appearing as conspicuously dependant on state relief as those they perceived as inferior outside of the camp. The account of U.S. Admiral Davis provides an insight into the conditions for those outside of the racecourse camp and thus highlights the stark contrast between the relief afforded to the two groups. Davis’s report describes those outside the exclusive camp as being camped under the ‘rudest and flimsiest improvised shelters, mere sheets and cloths’, their only source of water contaminated.⁴⁵⁷ In the examples of 1898 and 1907, we can see that the control of space was still central to colonial relief efforts toward the end of the nineteenth century, but that it took on an extra dimension in the era of wage labour.

Returning to the debate around disaster as a critical juncture or as an accelerant of the status quo, we can see why it has limited explanatory value for British responses to Caribbean disasters across the nineteenth century. In all but 1834, there was an acceleration of the status quo through the reinstating of controls on movement and the harshening of punishments. In the case of 1831 where the pass system had become relaxed over time, legislative changes were quickly brought in to re-establish a level of control similar to that which the system had previously allowed. Later in the nineteenth century whilst wage labour had replaced slavery, concerns that linked crowding of the labouring population, looting and other forms of civil unrest persisted. In 1902, these concerns were responded to with the hiring of a militia and in 1907, they were responded to with even greater strength with the deployment of the WIR. Across the nineteenth century, for white elites, the perceived need to reassert their control

⁴⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁵⁷ TNA, CO 137/661, Howard to Grey, 4 February, 1907.

over the post-disaster situation remained at the forefront of their immediate responses the impacts of natural hazards. However, it is again worth stressing that though nature-induced disasters elevated societal tension, this was never a permanent change – Kingston did not remain under martial law for ever.

It is clear that across the long nineteenth century, British elites felt that the chaos and destruction occasioned by disaster threatened their control, yet across this period no insurrection or large scale civil unrest followed a disaster. Given the population demographics and the level of oppression inherent to British Caribbean colonialism across the nineteenth century, the society certainly appeared ripe for an attempt to change the balance of power especially at the point where colonial forces were weakened. In these circumstances, why disaster does not manifest a moment of critical juncture becomes an interesting question, especially in a period of oppression as great as that of slavery and particularly in 1831 where to some degree the progress being made towards emancipation was known by Barbados' enslaved people.⁴⁵⁸ Though it is often hard to retrieve the voice of the enslaved, in the case of 1831 a remark that the author of the *Account* makes is telling regarding this question of the lack of rebellion. Speaking of the population of Barbados the author of the *Account* notes:

The heart of each was surcharged with distress, the voice was paralyzed and denied the power of utterance; neither could congratulate the other on the safety of his life, or recite his disconsolate tale; but the silent, convulsive grasp of the hand emphatically expressed “my affliction is greater than I can bear!”

Similarly, on Dominica in 1834, Reverend George Clarke wrote ‘Our labouring population over all the country, are without houses of scarcely any description to shelter

⁴⁵⁸ Beckles, ‘Emancipation by Law or War?’, p. 81.

them, and are disquieted and dejected at this loss'.⁴⁵⁹ Following the 1847 hurricane, Graham Reid Lieutenant Governor of Tobago wrote that people there were 'paralysed'.⁴⁶⁰ In effect, we can infer that the totalising destruction of the events of 1831 and 1834 was such that despite the shortages of food and the treatment the African-Caribbean population were subjected to (particularly in 1831), despair characterised their response rather than anger. At least in part contributing to this despair was no doubt the loss of their homes and other material possessions made doubly worse by their extremely limited economic agency. In Bayley's *Four Years' Residence in the West Indies*, he visits the huts of the enslaved people of the Colville Estate on Barbados and expresses surprise at the 'homeliness' of the huts of the enslaved and the number of material effects they owned.⁴⁶¹ With limited economic agency and no insurance, the destruction occasioned by disaster must have been accompanied by the realisation that more than ever they were reliant on white elites for both their very survival and the chance to rebuild their homes and regain their material possessions. If anything, hurricanes may have, at least in one case, averted rebellion as Polly Pattullo suggests in her examination of maroonage in Dominica.⁴⁶² In 1813 a hurricane destroyed the provision ground of the island's enslaved peoples thus making them reliant on the colonial authorities for food at the point at which they had previously been trying to challenge them.

This reluctance to engage in insurrection after a disaster is most striking in the aftermath of a hurricane that hit Antigua on 12 August 1835. In the week prior to the hurricane on 3 August there had been reports of large-scale labour unrest with 2,300 apprenticed labourers refusing to work in the belief that the King of England was soon to provide them with better conditions. In response the police had to be deployed to 'strike

⁴⁵⁹ TNA, T1/4397, Extract of a letter sent by Rev George Clarke to (recipient not given), 20 September, 1834.

⁴⁶⁰ SOAS, Incoming correspondence. Tobago/Box 1, Reid to Grey, 14 October, 1847.

⁴⁶¹ Bayley, *Four years' residence in the West Indies*, pp. 90-93.

⁴⁶² Polly Pattullo, *Your Time Is Done Now: Slavery, Resistance, and Defeat: The Maroon Trials of Dominica (1813-1814)* (NYU Press, 2015), p. 11.

terror into the minds of the disaffected'.⁴⁶³ In this sense, the stage was set for the destruction and chaos caused by the hurricane to stoke this discontent, yet following the hurricane there were not even any reports of looting.

There are also parallels to be drawn with the scant references we get to the behaviour of the general populace in 1907, who appear to have expended more energy simply trying to retrieve the bodies of loved ones rather than participate in looting.⁴⁶⁴ Across a century of disasters it appears that despite the racialised perceptions of white elites, the African-Caribbean population seems to have been concerned with simply surviving their aftermaths rather than using them as opportunities. It is clear from this section however that white elites were unwilling to see this pattern and that fear of civil unrest (at the very least) shaped their immediate responses to disaster. If there was any time in which the authorities and the African-Caribbean populations were to come into conflict it was because of the relief measures white elites enforced, and not of some desire to exploit crisis on the part of the African-Caribbean population.

4.4 The intersection of food, labour and relief

This chapter has so far established that across the nineteenth century the immediate response of white elites to disaster was to take actions that they felt shored up their control of the colony. This desire manifested in efforts directed to prevent large gatherings of the African-Caribbean population, limit their freedom of movement and where possible return them to their traditionally rural places of work. However, this approach had obvious limitations in that whilst it temporarily allayed their fears of insurrection and civil unrest, it alone would not

⁴⁶³ TNA, CO 71/79 (Dominica) Correspondence, Original - Secretary of State: Despatches; Offices and Individuals, MacGregor to Glenelg, 3 August, 1835.

⁴⁶⁴ Aulay Babington Macaulay, 'Account of Jamaican earthquake' 14 January, 1907, p. 18.

reinstate the status quo they desired. The damage occasioned by disaster often created specific issues that, beyond the transgressions of informal rules around space and movement, were perceived as threatening the colonial hierarchy.

The region's natural hazards very frequently destroyed not only the plantations and their cane crop, something which all but guaranteed economic losses for the planter, but they also destroyed the provision grounds allotted to the African-Caribbean population. Consequently, reflecting the vulnerability created by the plantation's marginalisation of other crops, across all the cases of disaster in the nineteenth century significant food shortages appear to have been recurrent. However, the perceived threat posed by this destruction went deeper. The provision ground as well as the plantation was a site of labour and, in the British Caribbean, labour, even after the period of slavery, was crucial to maintaining control over the African-Caribbean population.

The need for labour was the reason African peoples were first brought to the region and centuries of racist rhetoric reinforced that this was their only function in Caribbean society. Thus, often disaster created a two-fold crisis for white elites. Firstly, they were faced with a population that needed feeding, but secondly, this was a population that in their eyes could only fulfil one role - the labourer - yet the destruction of their sites of labour rendered it difficult to force them back into that position. Consequently, as this chapter will show, when relief was apportioned by white elites it was shaped by these anxieties and sought to resolve them. Reflecting the colonial need to feel in control of the post-disaster situation, across the nineteenth century relief in the Caribbean thus became a process in which the African-Caribbean population was forced back to work to both limit the economic losses of white elites but also to 'earn' food and the materials to rebuild their homes.

As the literature review chapter of this thesis showed, the intertwining of labour and relief was by no means unique to British colonial responses to disaster in the Caribbean. Work schemes were deployed during the Irish famine and in India throughout the nineteenth century. Nor was it unique to the colonial setting; in fact it was arguably inspired by the changes in British thought regarding welfare that manifested in the 1834 Poor Law Amendment Act. However, as this section of the chapter will show, in the British Caribbean relief, labour and the need for control coalesced in a unique way that was at times more lenient and at others harsher than other colonial experiences.

In the era of slavery there appears to have been a good understanding on the part of colonial officials and the Plantocracy of the danger that they would find themselves in if they did not provide the enslaved population with food. In 1812 individual planters came to Kingstown to find provisions ‘especially for the slaves’, however there was a lack of dry provisions throughout the island.⁴⁶⁵ Consequently, the *St Vincent Gazette* printed a call from the planters that highlighted the destruction of provision grounds ahead of their own crops and stressed that they expected a governmental response: ‘we trust the legislature will immediately adopt such measures as will ensure the importation of dry provisions sufficient for the call of the inhabitants’.⁴⁶⁶

American produce was embargoed in British Caribbean colonies in 1812.⁴⁶⁷ However, despite this, and to a degree demonstrating the perceived need for these supplies, not only did St Vincent’s legislature vote to set aside £2,000 for the purchase of American provisions, so did Barbados’ legislature, regardless of the fact the island was largely unaffected by the eruption.⁴⁶⁸ Barbados voted to offer St Vincent £1000 with £400 of that being personally

⁴⁶⁵ TNA, CO 28/81, Beckwith to Earl of Liverpool, 9 May, 1812.

⁴⁶⁶ Extract of *St Vincent Gazette*, reprinted in the *London Gazette*, 2 May, 1812.

⁴⁶⁷ TNA, CO 28/81, Beckwith to Earl of Liverpool, 9 May, 1812.

⁴⁶⁸ TNA, CO 28/81, Beckwith to Earl of Liverpool, 13 May, 1812.

subscribed by the island's Governor George Beckwith.⁴⁶⁹ The supplies purchased from America were crucial in 'doing away with the dread of famine' and interestingly appear to have been supplied to the enslaved population without the punitive conditions that would later be so commonly attached to relief.⁴⁷⁰ This relief appears to have been brought in and distributed relatively quickly and although a year later the planters were still making dire predictions about their survival, these were instead based on economic circumstances not the availability of provisions: 'If we do not get relief, I fear we must abandon our estates, and our poor Negroes must be divided into lots and sold for the benefit of our creditors, and the families torn from each other'.⁴⁷¹ There is also evidence to suggest that these planters were exaggerating their condition to try to increase their chances of receiving Parliamentary relief. The content of the communications between Parliament and colonial memorialists will be explored in chapter five.

What is particularly interesting about the case of 1812 is the apparent absence of even a loosely constructed relief effort, perhaps owing to the fact that the Governor of the colony was absent, detained in Britain giving evidence in the court of King's Bench in a trial.⁴⁷² As the chapter will go on to show, at various points throughout the nineteenth century governors played an important role in constructing relief efforts. In another contrast to later relief responses to disaster, there is little to suggest that in 1812 there was a strict punitive regime constructed around relief. This absence of records does not mean however that these provisions were simply given away; there can be no doubt that the reconstruction of the plantation infrastructure was done by the enslaved people.

⁴⁶⁹ Stuart Rothsey, 'Account of the Eruption at St Vincent in May 1812 [&] its effects on Barbadoes', pp. 141-143.

⁴⁷⁰ TNA, CO 260/29, Paul to Earl of Liverpool, 16 May, 1812.

⁴⁷¹ *Parliamentary Papers* (1812-13), House of Commons [182] St Vincent. Report from committee on petition of persons interested in estates in the island of St Vincent, p. 11, Address to His Royal Highness the Prince Regent, from the Council and Assembly of St Vincent.

⁴⁷² TNA, CO 263/4, St Vincent, Privy Council Meeting, 1 September, 1812.

It is in the relief response to 1831 that we can see a clear and purposeful combining of the need for food on the part of the enslaved and the colonial desire to force this group back into their position within the colony's hierarchy: that of the labourer. Reflecting the vulnerability engendered by plantation agriculture, after the hurricane of 1831 food was in short supply. Yet, though large portions of the enslaved population's provision grounds were ruined, the need for supplies was placed second to the need to ensure that the labouring population were put back to work. Though colonial officials repeatedly used the word famine in their council meetings and in their communications back to England (again, the potential for exaggeration in these reports will be discussed in chapter five), food was not simply handed out to the starving. In fact, provisions sent to the island were actively turned away.

From a report written on 2 September, we know that provisions arrived into Barbados from the Berbice region of British-controlled Guyana. Crucially, these supplies were intended to be sold to the inhabitants but, as John Drake the planter and council member charged with overseeing 'relief' put it, '[these supplies] were not required at Barbados either by the troops or by the inhabitants, nor at any other station'.⁴⁷³ He further argued that 'They could not be housed anywhere, the sending of them back was the most advantageous mode that could be adopted for the public interest'.⁴⁷⁴ In consequence of this Drake returned the 'wholly unnecessary and unsolicited' provisions knowing full well that they would spoil on their return to the Berbice region.⁴⁷⁵ Implicitly, Drake's actions reveal some of the thought processes underpinning British Caribbean 'relief' practices; Drake was not prepared to simply distribute relief free of charge, indeed as this chapter will later show in 1831 and in many other cases, relief was something white elites felt had to be earned through labour. What is more, that the provisions 'could not be housed anywhere' demonstrates the need for

⁴⁷³ TNA, T1/4395 Long Papers, bundle 852, part 1: West Indies Relief, Drake to Stewart, 17 February, 1832.

⁴⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁷⁵ Ibid.

the provisions to be stored in a place over which control could be exerted. Drake's striking actions do not appear to have been commonplace, though it is worth noting that during a severe drought in 1837, the Antiguan legislature turned down the delivery of water from Barbados so as not to harm the island's 'honour'.⁴⁷⁶ Similarly, in 1866, it appears that to avoid the effort of distributing relief a justice of the peace from Exuma (a Bahamian out island) simply refused provisions from Governor Rawson Rawson. Later he reversed this position when the island's inhabitants threatened to lynch him.⁴⁷⁷

In 1831 Barbados' honour does not appear to have been at stake but rather the capacity of the colonial authorities to control the storage and distribution of the provisions. It is also noteworthy that Drake, in consequence of his reservations did not simply send them on to St Vincent which was also suffering from an acute lack of provisions as the same hurricane had similarly damaged the provision grounds of the enslaved on that island. Writing on 9 September 1831, J. Colquhoun, a colonial agent, noted the anxiety of the Vincentian planters over the destruction of provision grounds and the fact that were food to arrive from the U.S. it would surely arrive at the more important Barbados ahead of St Vincent.⁴⁷⁸ What we can further glean from Drake's actions is that although the provision grounds of the enslaved were destroyed, the planters had some other means of feeding themselves. Similarly, on St Vincent Colquhoun noted that there were still some 'scanty' supplies held by the merchants.⁴⁷⁹

In this sense, relief was not so much an immediate problem for the Plantocracy as food was available for them. The problem was the enslaved population and how to control their movement (as already shown) but also how to keep them alive (they were after all

⁴⁷⁶ Flannigan, *Antigua and the Antiguans*, pp. 192–193.

⁴⁷⁷ Neely, *The Great Bahamas Hurricane of 1866*, p. 144.

⁴⁷⁸ TNA, T1/4395, Colquhoun to Stewart, 9 September, 1831.

⁴⁷⁹ *Ibid.*

regarded as property) in a manner that not did exacerbate what was viewed as their racially inherent laziness, something the free distribution of relief was regarded as having the potential to do. West Indian planters had long argued that the enslaved were childlike, unready for freedom and in need of strict white guidance.⁴⁸⁰ In 1831, this language came to the fore as a means to reinstate Barbados' racial hierarchy; in his reports back to Britain, Governor Lyon stressed that in the immediate period after the hurricane, the enslaved were 'without guidance, always idle'.⁴⁸¹ The enslaved population were forced back into work clearing roads, burying all dead livestock and destroying any vegetable matter that might putrefy. With the enforcement of labour, wages were paid at different increments to reflect supposed ability, thus rebuilding the hierarchy. Day labourers were to be paid two shillings and six pence per day, common carpenters and masons three shillings and nine pence, good ones five pence per day, and master workmen six shillings and three pence.⁴⁸²

Governor Lyon reported that the enslaved population was 'much inclined to be idle' but that they then resumed work and were 'perfectly obedient to their masters', whereupon both black and white people worked together with 'firmness and resignation'.⁴⁸³ Obviously, Lyon reporting anything other than peaceful cooperation would have caused those in Britain to reflect on his ability to perform his role, whereas the author of the *Account* suggested that there was large-scale plunder which, if left unchecked, would have 'involved this wretched country in all the miseries of famine'.⁴⁸⁴ Colonel Hinds, the owner of the Spring Garden estate, reported that authority was totally disregarded. Similarly, at the Black Bess plantation the enslaved people were reportedly 'very disorderly and using threats'.⁴⁸⁵ It is difficult to see these perceived transgressions as the sparks of a potential rebellion: rather, they were

⁴⁸⁰ Lambert, *White Creole Culture, Politics and Identity during the Age of Abolition*, p. 182.

⁴⁸¹ *PP*, HoC [197], p. 2, Lyon to Goderich, 13 August, 1831.

⁴⁸² *Barbados Globe and Colonial Advocate*, 23 August, 1831.

⁴⁸³ Editor of the 'West Indian', *Account of the Fatal Hurricane*, p. 77, 117.

⁴⁸⁴ *Ibid*, p. 117.

⁴⁸⁵ *Ibid*, p. 118.

simply the cry of an oppressed people who, having lost everything - family, friends and material possessions - resisted the system that oppressed them being so rapidly re-asserted over their drastically altered circumstances. The fact that in both these and other cases their crime, besides supposed behavioural transgressions, was reaping any corn left untouched by the hurricane, is testament to their desperation.⁴⁸⁶ Indeed, with the exception of taking what is referred to as 'some gunpowder', the enslaved people of Barbados appear to have done little besides scavenge food from the islands ruins.⁴⁸⁷

Sir Reynold Alleyne, dispatched around the island to quell unrest, attempted to placate enslaved labourers by rhetorically undoing some of the otherisation that was used daily to dehumanise enslaved peoples. On arriving at a plantation Alleyne said he came to labourers as a 'friend', but that due to their behaviour he was induced to bring a military force to restore order. He further argued that the hurricane's damage created a 'common distress' that 'involved both master and slave' and to which, like his own enslaved charges, they should act with 'obedience and attention'.⁴⁸⁸ Crucially, and exposing the very fear plantation owners had after a hurricane, Alleyne stressed that the 'uproar of the elements could not sever the tie that existed between them and their owners, but that it ought if possible to have united them more strongly'.⁴⁸⁹

In his study of the 1816 Barbadian rebellion David Lambert highlights the fact that in the five days that followed the first outbreak of fighting, two proclamations were issued. The first one on the second day of fighting threatened summary punishments for all involved, but the second was what Lambert terms 'more conciliatory in tone and policy'.⁴⁹⁰ Lambert argues that this switch was above all representative of the desire to try to restore the hierarchy

⁴⁸⁶ Ibid, p. 116.

⁴⁸⁷ Ibid, p. 120.

⁴⁸⁸ Ibid, p. 119.

⁴⁸⁹ Ibid, p. 119.

⁴⁹⁰ Lambert, *White Creole Culture, Politics and Identity during the Age of Abolition*, p. 124.

between master and slave.⁴⁹¹ In 1831 this switch repeats itself to a degree; Lyon's initial proclamation struck a harsh tone, but in practice as shown by Alleyne's address there was an acknowledgement that a conciliatory tone was also necessary to achieve the ultimate goal of restoring the established hierarchy.

However, Alleyne's conciliatory tone was in reality a thin facade. It was a cover for his goal of reinstating the master and slave hierarchy, something which some enslaved people clearly saw through. The author of the *Account* tells us that this address was met with 'insolent language' and agitation from certain 'ringleaders'.⁴⁹² As a show of his and the Plantocracy's true intentions, Alleyne had the worst offenders brought forward and punished with fifty lashes. Control and re-establishment of order were of greater paramountcy than getting Barbadians to work for the restoration of the island together. This pattern repeated itself round the island; any enslaved person who tried to persuade his fellow slaves that they need not work was flogged.⁴⁹³ Another enslaved person who attempted to resist the small forces dispatched around to restore 'order' was shot dead when he struck a soldier.⁴⁹⁴ As the days passed following the hurricane, Lyon's despatches continued in a tone that highlighted the cooperation of those on the island. Regarding the progress of relief, he stated that 'all classes and all colours vied with each other in their haste to contribute their mite towards relieving the wants of the poor and houseless'.⁴⁹⁵

In 1831 the link between work and relief is clear, but appears as an ad-hoc response to a disaster situation. What is more, this response, as harsh and punitive as it was, was legally acceptable because its intended targets were enslaved peoples with little to no rights. In that context, the importance placed upon labour by the white elites as a method for control,

⁴⁹¹ Ibid, p. 125.

⁴⁹² Editor of the 'West Indian' *Account of the Fatal Hurricane*, p. 120.

⁴⁹³ Ibid, p. 121.

⁴⁹⁴ Ibid, p. 121.

⁴⁹⁵ *PP*, HoC [197], p.2, Lyon to Goderich, 13 August, 1831.

particularly in the post-disaster context, is even more explicitly realised in the post-slavery era. For example, in 1833 as the apprenticeship system came into law in Jamaica, the Governor Howe Brown in his proclamation to the newly made apprentices made it clear that despite new regulations that limited the amount of work they could be asked to do to nine hours in a day, following a hurricane or an earthquake a plantation owner could require them to work for longer to ensure crops were harvested.⁴⁹⁶

4.5 Post-emancipation continuities

Though slavery ended in 1833, plantation agriculture did not and as such the post disaster food shortages it engendered continued to create conflict between the Plantocracy and the African-Caribbean population. The 1834 hurricane on Dominica seems to have destroyed provision grounds of every description as well as all of the coffee and half the sugar cane. The population was largely reduced to scavenging food from the ground where it had been uprooted but otherwise survived the impact of the wind. It was said that these scavenged foodstuffs would only last a fortnight, or at most three weeks, before famine was imminent.⁴⁹⁷ In these circumstances, frustration on the part of the planters quickly emerged; Dugald Laidlaw wrote to fellow Dominica planter Thomas Greg that:

The rich, respectable founders the planters [have] with every disposition sought to assist them [the labourers]’ but that ‘ever since the hurricane, the negroes have been behaving ill, and have done little towards rebuilding their houses – on which they have been exclusively employed. Finding that my Brother was nearly dead from being

⁴⁹⁶ *PP*, HoC [521], Papers in explanation of the measures adopted by his Majesty’s Government for giving effect to the act for The Abolition of Slavery throughout the British Colonies: Part 1. Jamaica, 1833-1835, p. 43.

⁴⁹⁷ TNA, T1/4397, Extract of a letter sent by Rev George Clarke to (recipient not given), 20 September, 1834.

buried in the ruins of the great house, they robbed and plundered everything they could lay their hands upon.⁴⁹⁸

Despite his obvious distaste for how he perceived the behaviour of his apprenticed labourers he noted that feeding them was an ‘unavoidable expense’.⁴⁹⁹

Similarly to 1831, it can be seen that the planters of Dominica responded to the chaos and potential for starvation by attempting to force their apprenticed labourers back to work, though it must be noted it was under less harsh terms. As Laidlaw writes, the apprenticed labourers were employed in the reconstruction of their own home; something which is a marked difference from clearing the streets of Bridgetown in 1831. However, the apprentices appear to have chafed at these orders, preferring instead to focus on the potentially more pressing need to feed themselves. An anonymous Dominican planter wrote that his workers implored the estate owner to let them attend to their cassava which was beginning to rot and was their, in his words, ‘best stand by, as it may be preserved for any length of time’.⁵⁰⁰ No doubt because the African-Caribbean population was now apprenticed and not enslaved, affording them a modicum of rights, they were not subjected to the harsh ordinances that controlled movement and threatened with jail as was the case in 1831. However, it can still be seen that the desire to fix the African-Caribbean population into their perceived position as labourers again drove the responses of the Plantocracy. The planters of Dominica were clearly cognisant of the threat posed by the destruction of provision grounds but were keen to solve that issue themselves. The apprenticed population also recognised the severity of the threat. Indeed, even the number of children that now needed feeding was noted by Laidlaw who said they were doing what they could to immediately feed them.⁵⁰¹

⁴⁹⁸ TNA, T1/4397, Colquhoun to Rice, 2 October, 1834.

⁴⁹⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰⁰ TNA, T1/4397, Extract of letter from Rosalie Estate contained within Laidlaw to Gregg, 2 October, 1834.

⁵⁰¹ TNA, T1/4397, Colquhoun to Rice, 2 October, 1834.

As the chapter will further show, committing the African-Caribbean population to work in the immediate aftermath of disaster largely remained a constant of British relief in the Caribbean. However, given the ad-hoc way in which these events were responded to and the lack of a codified response pattern as chapter three showed, there were exceptions to these rules. Perhaps because of the aforementioned work stoppages that occurred in the week prior to the hurricane, the Governor Evan Macgregor took the unprecedented step of calling upon the island's legislature to provide immediate shelter to those without homes.

Similarly, colonial expectations of the African-Caribbean population could often be confounded to the extent that it precluded the perceived need for relief efforts that were punitive. In 1834 the hurricane that hit Dominica destroyed the provisions of the apprenticed population, thus meaning that feeding themselves understandably became their primary concern to the chagrin of the Plantocracy who wanted to control them through labour. In contrast, the Antiguan earthquake of 1843 levelled large parts of the island's built environment but did little damage to its crops, meaning that the prime concern of the labouring classes was rebuilding their homes, something which aligned with the colonial desire to ensure that they were engaged in work.

In 1843, pillage was much dreaded and traditional patterns of response quickly emerged.⁵⁰² Governor Charles Fitzroy summoned the Magistrates, merchants and principal inhabitants to the Government House where measures were resolved upon for the security of property, special constables sworn in, and a detachment of the 47th Regiment marched down to the Police Quarters to assist in cases of 'necessity'.⁵⁰³ Yet, the following day Fitzroy reported that 'with only trifling exceptions no attempt at plunder has been made'. The lack of the perceived threat was such that the Governor rode through Antigua's streets and country to

⁵⁰² *PP*, HoC [441], p.3, Fitzroy to Stanley, 10 February, 1843.

⁵⁰³ *Antigua Weekly Register*, Feb 9, 1843.

assess the damage himself.⁵⁰⁴ Fitzroy went on to report that ‘the conduct of the labouring population has been most praiseworthy’.⁵⁰⁵ However, perhaps most striking is the fact that where they could have potentially taken advantage, the labouring population came forward to state that they would not use the opportunity presented to them and raise the price of their labour.⁵⁰⁶ All classes were reported as having participated in at least the clearing of streets, disposal of rubbish and the pulling down of buildings; in this we can see a contrast to the conflicts reported in 1831 and even the frustration expressed in 1834. To some degree when the priorities of the white elites and labouring population aligned after a disaster, conflict and punitive relief could be avoided.

In the first half of the nineteenth century we can see that colonial and plantocratic responses to the disasters were ad-hoc, there was no overriding code governing relief practices. This is evident when contrasting the harsh punitive treatment that emerged in response to the Barbadian hurricane of 1831 with the rebuilding efforts that followed the Antigua earthquake of 1843. Even comparing these two cases there is an obvious change in labour relations meaning that the Plantocracy were not able to exert as much control over the African-Caribbean population. That said, the point remains that in 1847, given the actions they took such as deploying the 47th regiment, they felt it necessary to protect themselves and were prepared to use violence to do so. Despite this, it is worth noting that relatively less punitive relief emerged in 1843.

In Barnett’s *Empire of Humanity*, he stresses the link between the passage of the New Poor Law of 1834 and developments in the way in which relief was constructed in British colonies. That might be to some degree applicable to the example he gives of Indian famine

⁵⁰⁴ *PP*, HoC [441], p. 3, Fitzroy to Stanley, 10 February, 1843.

⁵⁰⁵ *Ibid.*

⁵⁰⁶ *Ibid.*

relief, but it appears less directly applicable to the British-controlled Caribbean. In fact, we see a method of relief emerge that is unique to the Caribbean. In 1831, it can be seen that relief, along with the other top-down punitive measures, was used to incentivise the enslaved population to work and that accompanying these actions was rhetoric that stressed that these measures were employed to combat idleness and vagrancy. In this we can see resonances with British domestic relief practices, but they are no more than that.

Though in Britain schemes that mandated that the poor work for their relief were experimented with prior to the passage of the Amendment, it was not until 1834 that they were enshrined in law – we can see that the Caribbean was ahead of Britain in this respect. On the point of the rhetoric that accompanied the creation of these schemes, the language of idleness and vagrancy was certainly used in the political dialectic that accompanied the passage of the Amendment of 1834. However, in the Caribbean these terms appear as part of a racialised discourse directed towards the African-Caribbean population, not it appears as part of the domestic discourse of political economy. In contrast to the British poor, these traits were seen to be inherent in the imagined racial concept of the African race, it was not a state they could work themselves out of.

In addition to these finer points of nuance, there is also the fact that, as we can see on Dominica in 1834 and to some degree we can infer in the case of 1812, relief was a cost borne by the Plantocracy and could be distributed without condition. These were not so much moments of plantocratic benevolence for their suffering apprentices and slaves, but moments that reflect the degree to which that plantation agriculture created vulnerability that made this expenditure and distribution a reality. These actions were also clearly borne out of a fear that without food the enslaved population would pose a serious threat to colonial control given the population ratios of these islands. In totality, we can see that at least in the first half of the

nineteenth century British Caribbean relief practices definitely had connections with British domestic relief practices and practices in India. However, relief in the Caribbean was overwhelmingly ad-hoc and thus shaped to a great degree by the varying labour relations between the Plantocracy and the African-Caribbean population as well as the food shortages engendered by the plantation. In contrast to the work schemes deployed in India in the latter part of the nineteenth century, those deployed in the Caribbean do appear to have had utility to the colonial state. This is something which was surely born from the simple fact that unlike famine, hurricanes and earthquakes destroyed infrastructure that needed repairing.

In the latter half of the nineteenth century, what we see is a much closer alignment between traditional British notions of poor relief and the schemes deployed in response to disaster. In 1898, though the period of slavery had long passed as was mentioned in chapter three, plantation agriculture remained the sole way in which British colonial officials envisaged profit could be derived from the Caribbean colonies. From the colonial perspective, for the plantation to function it would have to be worked by the African-Caribbean population. Thus, for British colonialism to function as Britain wanted it to in the post-emancipation Caribbean, the African-Caribbean population had to remain a controllable labour force. In a manner similar to relief responses to disaster in the early nineteenth century, this dynamic remained one of the key thought processes underpinning relief not just in 1898 but through to 1907. However, as this chapter will go on to show, though civil unrest remained a perceived threat in the post-disaster context, in the period after slavery the fear of a total insurrection of the labouring population was less acute.

On both St Vincent and Barbados, following the widespread destruction of homes and crops, the labouring population were instantly reliant on the colonial authorities for aid. Relief was to some degree forthcoming, but from the start using it as a tool to put the African-Caribbean population back to work was a key shaper of relief. On St Vincent,

Moloney authorised indiscriminate relief for two days, after which those the authorities deemed fit to work were to be denied access to further relief.⁵⁰⁷ Similar action was pursued by Hay's administrators on Barbados who argued that unless employment was impossible 'no ... relief should be given'.⁵⁰⁸ From the outset constructing relief in this manner had two key benefits. Firstly, it minimised charity dependence by shifting the responsibility of obtaining relief from the government to the individual, something perceived as especially important given the 1897 Royal Commission's poor assessment of the colonial finances in the region. Secondly, it, as ever, forced much of the African-Caribbean population to engage in labour even when the places they traditionally laboured (the plantations) lay in ruins. Indeed, Moloney's private correspondence regarding the initial indiscriminate distribution of relief implicitly shows his desire to honour the above two concerns. Moloney drew up harsh guiding principles for those involved in the distribution of aid, which, for example, ordered distributors to cease providing relief to any temporarily disabled person as soon as was possible. These guidelines also stated that the only circumstance in which distributors were allowed to make immediate remittances without deference to authority was when starvation was imminent.⁵⁰⁹

By the end of the nineteenth century the colonial authorities appear to have taken over much of the responsibility for disaster relief in place of the planter. However, little changed in the rhetoric that surrounded the process. Resonating with John Drake's refusal to freely distribute food in 1831, at the end of the nineteenth century it remained that white elites perceived labour for relief schemes as more beneficial to the African-Caribbean population than the free distribution of food. In line with the fact that they felt the African-Caribbean

⁵⁰⁷ *PP*, HoC [C.9205], West Indies. Correspondence, p. 17, Moloney to Chamberlain, 29 September, 1898.

⁵⁰⁸ *PP*, HoC [C.9205], West Indies. Correspondence, p. 74, Acting Governor Williams to Chamberlain, 25 November, 1898.

⁵⁰⁹ *Parliamentary Papers* (1899), House of Commons [C.9550], West Indies. Further Correspondence relating to the Hurricane on 10th-12th September, 1898, and the Relief of the Distress Caused Thereby, p. 16, Moloney to Chamberlain, 15 February, 1899.

population were racially predisposed to be labourers in the tropics it making them work for relief was necessary to avoid the 'wholesale demoralization of the populous'.⁵¹⁰ The fear of civil disobedience was also ever present and in this context, work was also seen as obviating the perceived danger posed by an able-bodied, African-Caribbean population 'with nothing to do'.⁵¹¹ In 1898, in line with the general trends of British colonial relief, the work schemes consisted of repairing colonial infrastructure; repairing roads, clearing debris and rebuilding the banks of low lying agricultural works flooded with saltwater.⁵¹²

Though paid, in 1898 for the African-Caribbean this form of so-called relief was, because of wider circumstances, more ineffective at actually providing *relief*. The usual post-hurricane food shortages were exacerbated by already depleted crops owing to a large drought that had afflicted the region in the months prior to the hurricane season. Consequently, on both St Vincent and Barbados both governors became quickly entirely reliant on imported foodstuffs to feed the population.⁵¹³ However, ongoing war between Spain and America had increased the price of imported food by around 20 per cent.⁵¹⁴ Consequently, the wages that labourers received for their work can only have allowed them to purchase small amounts of provisions.

That these schemes were ineffective at actually helping the African-Caribbean population is evident from the fact that in 1898 on St Vincent, three months after the hurricane, many cases of destitution still existed.⁵¹⁵ Yet, despite this observable failure, the desire to see the labouring population returned to employment reigned supreme; Moloney worked stringently to reduce the number of those still requiring relief, reallocating many

⁵¹⁰ *PP*, HoC [C.9205], West Indies. Correspondence, p. 15, Moloney to Chamberlain, 29 September, 1898.

⁵¹¹ *Ibid*;

PP, HoC [C.9205], West Indies. Correspondence, p. 79, Moloney to Chamberlain, 7 December, 1898.

⁵¹² *PP*, HoC [C.9205], West Indies. Correspondence, p. 35, Moloney to Chamberlain, 12 October, 1898.

⁵¹³ *PP*, HoC [C.9205], West Indies. Correspondence, p. 15, Moloney to Chamberlain, 29 September.

⁵¹⁴ TNA, CO 28/248, Williamson to Chamberlain, 14 June, 1898.

⁵¹⁵ *PP*, HoC [C.9205], West Indies. Correspondence, p. 81, Moloney to Chamberlain, 7 December, 1898.

sufferers a pauper dole, normally set at four shillings per month.⁵¹⁶ Moloney reduced this dole to three shillings, an amount which he privately admitted was ‘barely sufficient to support existence’ but argued would have the beneficial effect of forcing dependants to seek work.⁵¹⁷

This purposeful gatekeeping of relief through work schemes further demonstrates how little had changed since the period of slavery. Similarly, many of the same racist tropes remained prevalent in the discourse of white elites commenting on the aftermath of disasters. Only a month after the hurricane, a senior Naval Officer, Captain J.L. Burr of H.M.S *Intrepid*, referred to those still struggling to re-build their lives as ‘negro-loafers’.⁵¹⁸ Loafers who ‘would not work even if they were offered employment’ (a tacit acknowledgement that there was no work), and were quite prepared to incite others to acts of social unrest.⁵¹⁹ Similarly, two months from the storm, Moloney personally travelled around St Vincent to stress to the African-Caribbean population that they could not become dependent on even the work-for-relief schemes. Unhappy with the rate of their re-building effort he further felt it his duty to personally impress on the labouring population that if they were to expect any relief in the interim they must rebuild their own homes faster.⁵²⁰ However, the island, reflecting the vulnerabilities outlined in chapter two, was reliant on imported timber to rebuild so limits had to be placed on the amounts individuals could draw; the eighty foot limit settled on for labourers’ houses was something privately acknowledged by Moloney as ‘far from ideal’.⁵²¹

As this chapter has already shown in the example of the actions directed toward St Vincent’s Island Caribs, relief was clearly a tool that could be utilised to institute change. In

⁵¹⁶ Ibid.

⁵¹⁷ Ibid.

⁵¹⁸ *PP*, HoC [C.9205], West Indies. Correspondence, p. 43, Admiralty to Colonial Office, 20 October, 1898.

⁵¹⁹ Ibid.

⁵²⁰ *PP*, HoC [C.9205], West Indies. Correspondence, p. 58, Moloney to Chamberlin, 10 November, 1898.

⁵²¹ *PP*, HoC [C.9205], West Indies. Correspondence, p.62, Moloney to Chamberlin, 25 November, 1898.

1898 both Moloney and Chamberlain were keen to begin the resettlement of labourers on their own patches of land to institute a limited form of peasant proprietorship as had been recommended by the 1897 Commission's report. The report suggested resettlement as a solution to both stemming the flow of labour to non-British territories and freeing the state of some responsibility for the poverty of the labourers.⁵²² In 1898 the destruction of so much of the labouring population's property presented, in Moloney's eyes, the 'perfect opportunity' to begin resettling labourers whilst the devastation limited their will to resist.⁵²³

The 1897 Report had also proposed encouraging the migration of some labourers to other British territories, and the disruption created by the hurricane in 1898 was used opportunistically to try to initiate this movement.⁵²⁴ An arrangement was made with British Guiana which was experiencing an agricultural boom, whereby 500 agricultural labourers were to be sent to the region to begin work immediately.⁵²⁵ Keen to capitalise on the disruption, the governments of other British colonies such as Trinidad also expressed a willingness to accept agricultural labourers.⁵²⁶ Emigration was a tactic that had been previously used by African-Caribbean labourers to earn money and provide for their dependants outside of the control of the British government that ruled their island of origin.⁵²⁷ But, as part of the 'relief' effort in 1898, forcing the migration of labourers became beneficial for the colonial authorities; like the program of resettlement it was also an easy way to reduce the number of the indigents able to claim relief and furthermore, it was timely as it allowed British interests to capitalise on the ongoing boom in British Guiana.⁵²⁸

⁵²² West India Royal Commission, p. 349.

⁵²³ *PP*, HoC [Cd.9550], p. 22, Chamberlin to Moloney, 7 March, 1898; *PP*, HoC [C.9205], Moloney to Chamberlin, 25 September, 1898.

⁵²⁴ West India Royal Commission, pp. 356-360.

⁵²⁵ 'The West Indian Labour Problem', *The Times*, 17 October, 1898, p. 4.

⁵²⁶ *PP*, HoC [C.9205], West Indies. Correspondence, p. 60, Hay to Chamberlin, 10 November, 1898.

⁵²⁷ Colin Clarke, 'Demographic change and population movement', in *General History of the Caribbean volume IV, The Long Nineteenth Century: Nineteenth Century Transformation*, ed. by K.O. Laurence (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 1997), p. 269.

⁵²⁸ 'The West Indian Labour Problem', *The Times*, 17 October, 1898, p. 4.

The beginning of the twentieth century saw relief constructed in much the same punitive manner. The eruption of St Vincent's volcano occurred just four years after the hurricane of 1898 and yet despite relief being co-ordinated by a different governor, Llewelyn, it was constructed in a similarly punitive manner. That there were such similarities between these relief efforts is striking, particularly when compared to the variations of relief in the early half of the nineteenth century. Though it appears to have remained ad-hoc, even without codification in a written form, British relief practices evolved from the nineteenth century into something of a fixed form that at their core prioritised stringent punitive measures to discourage perceived 'idleness' and dependence.

Despite the fact that in 1902, the volcanic eruption caused injuries that threatened greater loss of life than any hurricane, such rhetoric remained at the forefront of the relief process. In 1902, the initial reports of the scale of the damage and number of casualties were perfunctory but provide enough detail to show that the immediate medical assistance available to those burned in the eruption was largely ineffective. Sufferers were attended to by local nurses, but nearly half of them died within the week.⁵²⁹ Initially the colonial authorities focused on pressing labourers into burying bodies to avert the spread of disease. Although this was an understandable precaution, it came at the expense of actually providing aid. Resonating with the rhetoric that commonly accompanied British poor relief, Chamberlain and Llewelyn were in agreement that in order to contain relief expenditure a form of 'labour test' needed to be introduced, whereby all those who were 'able-bodied' and sixteen and above were to be refused relief.⁵³⁰

⁵²⁹ *Parliamentary Papers* (1904), House of Commons [Cd.1768-8], St Vincent. Colonial Reports—annual, p. 25;

Parliamentary Papers, House of Commons [Cd.1783], West Indies. Further correspondence relating to the volcanic eruptions in St Vincent & Martinique, in 1902 & 1903, p.90, Llewelyn to Chamberlain, 2 August, 1902.

⁵³⁰ *PP*, HoC [Cd.1783], p. 79, Llewelyn to Chamberlain, 25 November, 1902.

With clear lineage from the conditions imposed on relief in 1898, ‘able-bodied persons’ were only able to receive relief in return for ‘bona-fide’ labour.⁵³¹ What was considered ‘bona-fide’ appear to have been tasks that benefitted the colonial state, improving and repairing infrastructure or participation in agricultural tasks and when these were brought to an end private interests sought to take advantage of the distress. For example, representatives of the Rowntree estate opportunistically suggested shipping off labourers to Dominica (where they also had estates) to upgrade its roads for wheeled traffic.⁵³² Similarly, Mr A. Porter, an estate owner, argued to have relief money spent on the restoration of his estate as he could employ the ‘excitable’ population arguing that non-employment would be disastrous for the colony.⁵³³ In contrast to the early nineteenth century when white elites seemed content merely for work to be engaged with, that same group in the early twentieth century appears more willing to use distress to their benefit. Such a change perhaps stemmed from the fact that at least in rural areas white elites feared civil unrest far less than in the period of slavery.

In contrast to the hurricane of 1898, which swept the whole island, in 1902 the eruption largely only affected the northern portion of the island, leaving the homes and places of employment for many untouched.⁵³⁴ Many were injured or killed outright, and this meant that there was a reduced number of claimants for material compensation. Perversely, this situation appears to have actually encouraged Llewelyn to create stricter stipulations for compensation claims. For example, Llewelyn dictated there was to be no compensation for the loss of earning power through the destruction of crops.⁵³⁵ Furthermore, for a claim to be

⁵³¹ *PP*, HoC [Cd.1783], p. 81, The Earl of Onslow to Llewelyn, 26 November, 1902.

⁵³² *PP*, HoC [Cd.1783], p. 98, Messrs. Rowntree and Company Limited to Colonial Office, 12 December, p. 98.

⁵³³ *PP*, HoC [Cd.1783], p. 38, Porter to Llewelyn, 12 September, 1902.

⁵³⁴ Frederick Ober, *Our West Indian Neighbors; the Islands of the Caribbean Sea, ‘America’s Mediterranean’: Their Picturesque Features, Fascinating History, and Attractions for the Traveler, Nature-Lover, Settler and Pleasure-Seeker* (New York, J. Pott & company, 1904), p. 194.

⁵³⁵ *PP*, HoC [Cd.1783], p. 19, Llewelyn to Chamberlain, 2 August, 1902.

made, the claimant had to renounce their ownership of the land so it could be vested in the Crown.⁵³⁶

Though surprisingly not for his restrictive rules around compensation claims, Llewelyn's actions were, in a first for British relief efforts up this point, subject to actual complaints from other concerned whites. The Wesleyan ministers Darrell and Huckerby, deemed 'mischievous' interferers by Llewelyn, took particular issue with the way in which the Governor had restricted the distribution of provisions that had arrived from the U.S.⁵³⁷ Where for lack of men to guard it, John Drake in 1831 had simply returned donations, Llewelyn was able to lock them in warehouses and pay, out of the relief fund, for police to guard them.⁵³⁸ These actions which Darrell called a 'violation of trust' further demonstrate the determination of Llewelyn to return the African-Caribbean population to work and reinvigorate market forces in the colony.⁵³⁹ St Vincent's share of the U.S. delivered supplies was no doubt adequate to feed its population and thus could have been distributed with little oversight. However, it appears that Llewelyn was cognisant that had he freely distributed these supplies St Vincent's labourers would have had no incentive to participate in his labour for relief schemes. Such a conclusion is borne out in the fact that some of these provisions were later sold to the population at a profit to the colonial state; most of them however, simply rotted.⁵⁴⁰

As this chapter has already shown, in 1907 the desire to re-assert control over the urban environment determined the colonial authorities' initial responses to the earthquake. Control was reconsolidated through armed guards and passes. As in nearly all of the cases of

⁵³⁶ Ibid.

⁵³⁷ TNA, CO 321/218, Llewelyn to Chamberlain, 26 January, 1903.

⁵³⁸ 'Protest against Llewelyn', the *Sentry*, 17 October, 1902.

⁵³⁹ TNA, CO 321/218, 'Protest by the unofficial members of the legislative council of St Vincent', 29 January, 1903.

⁵⁴⁰ 'Protest against Llewelyn', the *Sentry*, 17 October, 1902.

disaster considered in this thesis, control over the people of Kingston was secured through the enforcement of labour. Kingston's labourers were put to work in the business of pulling down buildings and clearing rubble and were encouraged to participate by a temporary doubling of wages. However, as early as 17 January, Swettenham detailed his annoyance with the slow progress of these employment schemes and suggested that the 'indisposition' of the labouring population was to blame.⁵⁴¹ Setting aside potential reticence to engage in dangerous work almost immediately in the wake of a disaster, details of these work schemes from first-hand accounts provide some insight into why some may have been indisposed to participate. British accounts such as that of C.L. Chenery describe the work schemes in relatively vague terms: 'where there was efficient direction the ordinary labourers worked with a will'.⁵⁴² However, the American Admiral Davis's account provides a different perspective: Davis saw African-Caribbean labourers pressed into gangs under guard.⁵⁴³ What is more, labourers did not receive cash for this work, but rather orders which were to be fulfilled at a later point. This not only required trusting that the colonial authorities would fulfil the orders, but also limited purchases to authorised vendors.

The organisation of these work schemes reflects another aspect of the conflicts engendered by post-emancipation urbanisation. Pedro Welch has argued that the urban environment placed greater emphasis on individualised work, something that lessened colonial control as it stood in direct contrast to the gang labour enforced on plantations.⁵⁴⁴ The fact that the colonial authorities drew upon centuries-old methods of control, with gangs of labourers led by white superiors, is a clear expression of the extent to which they prioritised the return of the labouring class to work.

⁵⁴¹ *PP*, HoC [Cd.3560], p. 27, Swettenham to Grey, 17 January, 1907.

⁵⁴² C.L. Chenery, 'The Jamaican Earthquake.', reprinted from the *Barbados Advocate*, 23, 24, 25, January, 1907, p. 6.

⁵⁴³ TNA, CO 137/661, Howard to Grey, 4 February, 1907.

⁵⁴⁴ Welch, 'Post-Emancipation Adjustments in the Urban Context', p. 274.

As has been shown to be the case in nearly all of the disasters considered in this thesis, the perceived insouciance of the African-Caribbean population in aftermath of disaster is typically highlighted to justify the harsh treatment directed towards them. This was no different in 1907, but also in the close, racially mixed environment of urban Kingston became a tool used to separate the actions of usually 'brave' whites from their African-Caribbean counterparts. For example, Major Chown relates that directly after the earthquake 'the black and coloured population were stupefied with terror and amazement', but that at once they became 'quite apathetic' and were to be found 'lounging in the streets...although labour [was] still in demand'.⁵⁴⁵

Placing labour ahead of relief was clearly the way the colonial authorities felt it was best to reinstate the social hierarchy in this time of crisis. Wage labour reactivated the market forces of supply and demand, something which again aided efforts to re-assert colonial control. But more importantly, wage labour was seen as aiding social discipline.⁵⁴⁶ Similarly, throughout periodic famines in India, Indians were forced into work schemes to prevent them becoming 'indolent, vagabonds, or vagrants'. Work was seen as morally beneficial; it ameliorated perceived racial characteristics that were seen to clash with colonial goals.⁵⁴⁷

In 1907 work-for-relief schemes were, similarly to those in 1898 and 1902, organised on an ad-hoc basis. They were still convened around the idea that they were to return Kingston's population to 'sturdy independence', again putting them in line with nineteenth-century British welfare thinking that was feared dependence and was adverse to large expenditure.⁵⁴⁸ Furthermore, in 1907 the free distribution of food was to be confined and

⁵⁴⁵ *PP*, HoC [Cd.3560], p.99, (Admiralty to Colonial Office, 26 February, 1907).

⁵⁴⁶ Holt, *The Problem of Freedom*, p. 318.

⁵⁴⁷ Sanjay Sharma, *Famine, Philanthropy and the Colonial State: North India in the Early Nineteenth Century* (New Delhi: OUP India, 2001), p. 14.

⁵⁴⁸ *Ibid*, p. 141.

stores were to be sold at market prices for orders given out for work after the earthquake.⁵⁴⁹ This arrangement clearly embodied many aspects of British welfare thinking and shows that although it was not formally codified relief usually coalesced around re-current underlying principles. Limiting the free distribution of food was done to limit the potential for Kingston's population to become dependent on free relief. Indeed, resuscitating business and by extension employment to obviate the potential for welfare dependence became a central concern for those in charge of relief distribution. That stores were to be sold and that the only capital available to purchase them was to be earned through labour is indicative of the colonial desire to re-assert control and revive market forces. Tying relief to labour in this manner effectively forced the labouring population to again come under colonial control if they were to survive.

In attempting to explain why relief assumed such a low priority for Swettenham and the Jamaican authorities, it is also important to understand to what extent the African-Caribbean population were considered eligible recipients of humanitarian aid. John Harrison has suggested that not until the twentieth century were the majority of the population of the Caribbean 'of primary humanitarian concern'.⁵⁵⁰ The idea that African-Caribbeans were not considered targets for humanitarian aid was, like the very social structure of the post-emancipation era, a direct inheritance from the era of slavery. During slavery, 'welfare' so far as it existed, was regarded as a private obligation of planters and merchants, nominally comprising subsistence and rudimentary healthcare to sustain the productivity of predominantly forced labour'.⁵⁵¹

⁵⁴⁹ *PP*, HoC [Cd.3560], p. 35, Swettenham to Colonial Office, 1 February, 1907.

⁵⁵⁰ John Harrison, 'The Colonial Legacy and Social Policy in the British Caribbean', in *Colonialism and Welfare: Social Policy and the British Imperial Legacy*, ed. by James Midgley and David Piachaud (Cheltenham: Edward Elgar, 2011), p. 57.

⁵⁵¹ *Ibid*, p. 55.

At the turn of the century these views remained common. An article in a Barbadian planter's newspaper in 1900 argued against any form of welfare provision for the African-Caribbean population because of their lower standard of living and affinity with the Caribbean environment: 'if a negro's house is destroyed by fire or tempest, how long do you think it will take him to build another? Nature will give him food almost for the asking'.⁵⁵² Implicit in this comment is the suggestion that because African-Caribbean living conditions were perceived as basic it lessened state responsibility towards them. Particularly in periods of crisis, the comment tacitly suggests that it was acceptable to leave the African-Caribbean population to fend for themselves. In this respect, it can be seen that early twentieth century attitudes pertaining to African-Caribbean entitlement to welfare had changed little since slavery.

Only in the days that followed the earthquake, once no large-scale discontent emerged and the status quo was to an extent re-asserted, did some form of relief effort began to take shape. Food distribution centres were established throughout Kingston and they served approximately 3400 people a day; this food was initially provided indiscriminately without condition. However, even with the free distribution of food, relief was lacking and disorganised. *Leslies Weekly* regarded the rations being distributed as 'meagre', consisting of only 'two potatoes, a piece of bread and some brown sugar and molasses'.⁵⁵³ Davis similarly reported that many of Kingston's populous were suffering from hunger, despite noting barrels of flour in addition to rice and maize strewn across the Royal Mail Wharf. Davis even went as far as to offer to use these ingredients to bake bread, but his offer was not accepted.⁵⁵⁴ All the while, in private correspondence members of the WIC writing to the Colonial Office were

⁵⁵² Bonham C. Richardson, *Panama Money in Barbados, 1900-1920* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee, 1986), p. 11.

⁵⁵³ 'After the fury of the earthquake in Kingston: a multitude of the homeless and destitute, without shelter and scantily supplied with food, and some peculiar effects of the shocks', *Leslies Weekly*, 21 February, 1907, p. 173.

⁵⁵⁴ TNA, CO 137/661, Howard to Grey, 4 February, 1907.

keen to stress that the earthquake had left Jamaica's agricultural arrangements unimpaired.⁵⁵⁵

Yet it appears that temporarily redirecting exports to feed Kingston's hungry population remained out of the question.

It is clear that even when the colonial authorities attempted some kind of relief effort they were unable or unwilling to make full use of the supplies available to them. What is more, the distribution of free food was curtailed by 8 February, only twenty-five days after the disaster.⁵⁵⁶ From 8 February onwards, any claimants for food were subjected to characteristically 'stringent' background checks that, in line with trepidation over welfare dependency, were implemented with the sole purpose of disqualifying as many claimants as possible.⁵⁵⁷ That less than a month after the earthquake the so-called relief committee sought to focus its energies on disqualifying as many claimants as possible is symptomatic of the way in which 'relief' was provided across the nineteenth century. In the majority of cases of relief, white elites had to balance limited benevolence with their desire to restore a colony to profitability. Ultimately, like the immediate responses that initially took precedence over relief, short-term colonial responses to disaster were governed by control: a desire to maintain control over the African-Caribbean population and, across all of the labour systems used for this, return them to their fixed position as worker.

4.6 Conclusion

This chapter has drawn out the commonalities in the immediate responses to disaster by British colonial authorities and, particularly in the first half of the nineteenth century, the

⁵⁵⁵ TNA, CO 137/662, McNeil to Grey, 7 February, 1907.

⁵⁵⁶ *PP*, HoC [Cd.3560], p. 75, Lord Mayor of London to Colonial Office, 12 February, 1907.

⁵⁵⁷ *Parliamentary Papers* (1907), House of Commons [Cd.4586], Jamaica. Further Correspondence Relating to the Earthquake at Kingston, Jamaica, on 14th January, 1907, pp.57-58, (Appendix V, General Relief Committee, p.25).

Plantocracy. The central theme underpinning these immediate responses was control. The first response was largely to control space where unrest could pose a threat to white control, namely in urban areas and to control movement to prevent mass groupings of African-Caribbean peoples. Regardless of whether they used it, post disaster, the African-Caribbean populations of the British Caribbean were afforded greater opportunity to transgress the rules imposed by the British owing to the disarray and destruction of the physical infrastructure that supported their control.

As much as the first responses were shaped by a desire to control movement and return the African-Caribbean population to the spaces they were ‘allowed’ to occupy, so too did it underpin the act of providing relief. The relief that followed this initial reassertion of control over space and movement sought also to reassert the racialised colonial hierarchy in which the African-Caribbean population could only ever occupy the position of labourer whether that be under the terms of slavery or later, wage labour. Though the passage of acts in 1831 and the deployment of the WIR in 1907 represent some form of accelerated status quo, these were temporary flashpoints. In 1902, that disaster provided the colonial authorities of St Vincent an opportunity to further the goals of expanding plantation production should be viewed as a similar flashpoint. The trend established in this chapter is that, in line with the relationship that the British had with the Caribbean as established in chapter three, immediate responses and relief appear overwhelmingly to be shaped by a desire to simply begin plantation production again.

In the context of the split in disaster risk reduction studies, this chapter shows that disaster in the nineteenth-century British-controlled Caribbean did not represent a critical juncture. Chapter three showed that earthquakes and hurricanes (which created more frequent damage) were hazards to be lived with and rarely to be prepared for. This mentality seems to have inhibited the ability of the potential for disaster to represent a critical juncture. Disasters

that have created a moment of critical juncture are ones that have been created by circumstances considerably outside the norm; hurricanes in particular caused varying levels of damage to British Caribbean colonies nearly every single year, perhaps normalising them. That said, whilst that analysis might to a small degree be applicable to both roughly grouped parties (whites and the African-Caribbean population), there is another more striking question. For a group who experienced such a consistent level of oppression over the nineteenth century, why was disaster never utilised as a moment of critical juncture by the African-Caribbean population to launch a large challenge of their oppression?

It appears that it was exactly this level of consistent oppression that appears to have prevented this from taking place. Across the different labour systems enforced in the nineteenth century the African-Caribbean population remained relatively poor and, even in the period of wage labour, with little economic agency to allow them to rebuild their lives. The damage wrought by regional hazards appears to have been such that it created both physical devastation of lives and property but also a mental devastation. Survival became paramount and, given the environmental changes wrought by colonialism, opportunities for survival were extremely limited. As established in chapter two, the plantation precipitated large-scale deforestation and marginalised most other crops. In addition, as established in the third chapter, food storage and preparation for shortages for the wider population were not a priority for the Plantocracy. These two issues were exacerbated by the fact that the colonies of the Caribbean were islands. Much to the chagrin of the colonial authorities, when famine struck in India, foraging for food in nearby forest was a common and effective response. By contrast, on the islands of the British-controlled Caribbean, such a response was not possible. Consequently, in this context we can see why large-scale resistance did not occur in the post-disaster moment. This chapter has shown that British relief practices were designed to

effectively make whites the gatekeepers of relief to induce the African-Caribbean population to accept the terms on which they wanted to distribute it.

Where this chapter has shown that colonial officials and plantation owners could exert great control through the immediate actions taken in response to disaster, chapter five will show that what they could not control was the response of Parliament. They could and did withhold vital provisions and use force to ameliorate the perceived risk of civil unrest, but questions concerning the rebuilding of infrastructure were not so easily resolved and help had to be solicited from the 'mother country'. Help was not always easily forthcoming.

5 - Negotiating the politics of long term relief

Where chapter four examined internal responses and relief in the immediate aftermath of disaster, this chapter examines how British Caribbean colonies sought external relief for their long-term recovery. White elites, faced with the destruction caused by the region's natural hazards, were forced, by virtue of wanting to return a colony to profitability, to seek relief greater than that which could be provided by (as the previous chapters have shown) the already depleted resources of their own colonies. Across the nineteenth century, the primary focus for those seeking relief was the British Parliament. Yet crucially, continuing a trend identified by Mulcahy in his study of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, Parliamentary relief was something that had to be negotiated and was not always forthcoming.

Chapter four showed that the idea that colonialism was to be a 'self-financing enterprise' meant relief was often constructed to limit all but 'unavoidable expenditure'.⁵⁵⁸ That axiom of short term relief also had a significant impact on long term aid. For the most part, economic considerations and priorities came before the relief of suffering. The colonial authorities of the various Caribbean colonies could not and did not want to simply authorise large-scale expenditure to begin recovery. The relief of those who felt the disaster most keenly - the African-Caribbean population and the small populations of poor whites – were placed second when white elites came together to issue a case for relief to Parliament. When suffering was foregrounded in these petitions, it appears the Plantocracy did so cynically, as although they may have stressed their desire to provide relief to indigent peoples, they were often complicit in making sure that it did not reach them.

This chapter will also show that petitioning for relief was a complex process as the economic objectives of colonial officials, the Plantocracy and Parliament were not

⁵⁵⁸ Barnett, *Empire of Humanity*, p. 62; TNA, T1/4397, Colquhoun to Rice, 2 October, 1834.

necessarily aligned and thus could come into conflict. Planters often wanted a full and complete recompense for all of the damage wrought by the region's hazards, but Parliament rarely trusted the loss estimations it received from them. Consequently, across the nineteenth century when Parliament did provide financial relief it never matched the estimates of loss that had been submitted to it. On the other side of these negotiations, Parliament often considered primarily a colony's perceived strategic importance and ability to quickly resume profitability as the deciding factors for relief.

Parliament, though it remained the place to which colonists directed the majority of their energy petitioning for relief, was not the only source from which relief could be received. As the nineteenth century progressed, the telegraph and a wider circulation of print media meant that the Western world became increasingly aware of Caribbean disasters. This increased awareness coupled with the development of a burgeoning culture of international charitable giving meant that subscriptions became an increasingly important source of revenue.

Similarly, in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century financial relief donated from other states emerged as a new source of charitable donation. This new generosity was not one-way, Britain often extended relief to fellow colonial powers in the region. In contrast to the economic underpinnings of Parliamentary relief, the discourse surrounding both charitable subscriptions (particularly those made in other countries) and state generosity stressed the desire to provide genuine relief. However, despite these appearances, relief exchanged between powers was often part of wider 'political game playing' in which they sought to strengthen relations or even potentially undermine Britain through their desire to appear benevolent.⁵⁵⁹ In the Caribbean, the greatest example of this political game playing

⁵⁵⁹ Hannigan, *Disasters Without Borders*, p. 97.

through relief followed the Jamaican earthquake of 1907 when, believing he was acting on British geo-political interests, the island's Governor Swettenham very publically refused U.S. aid.

This refusal, known as the 'American Incident', has only been examined by William Tilchin in *Theodore Roosevelt and the British Empire*. Given the obvious focus of Tilchin's book, his account, though useful, primarily examines the political machinations surrounding the event and not its effect on relief. What is more, reflecting his source base, Tilchin's work is an account written primarily from an American perspective. This chapter's examination of this event primarily focuses on its ramifications for the relief effort in Kingston and the schisms it exposed between the governor, the people of Kingston and the colonial office. This chapter provides a British-focused account drawing on records both from the National Archives and first-hand accounts from the Jamaican National Archives not otherwise used by Tilchin in his examination.

What this chapter shows is that, resonating with the conclusions chapter four drew on immediate responses, long-term, external aid was rarely provided solely to ameliorate suffering. Instead, financial relief was often another theatre for colonial and later international politics in which questions such as the Caribbean's overall importance to Britain were wrestled with. Despite this, it appears that relief arrived with a consistency that allowed such a vulnerable and fundamentally unsustainable society continued existence throughout the nineteenth century. What we see is that when financial relief was provided by Parliament it was done so within the rigid confines of the ideology already outlined: the colonies themselves should be self-financing and, as established in chapter three, the Caribbean in particular should provide profit not necessitate expenditure.

5.1 Rebuilding the colony

Reflecting the vulnerabilities inherent in plantation agriculture, the first hurdle to a colony's long-term recovery was averting starvation and collecting the materials to begin rebuilding. As outlined in chapter two, the plantation system was enabled by land clearance and severe deforestation and this obviously significantly limited the timber available to not only repair the infrastructure for sugar manufacture but also to provide simple shelter. Similarly, the plantation marginalised other subsistence crops in the sense that it limited the land available to grow them. It also, given the coerced labour that supported it, limited the time and energy that could be expended on growing other crops. Thus, in almost all disaster aftermaths across the nineteenth century, British Caribbean colonies found themselves in immediate need of external sources of both food and timber.

In the first half of the nineteenth century before the invention of the telegraph and its arrival in the Caribbean, the delay entailed in even sending a request for needed supplies back to Britain made it impractical (even with the extension of the telegraph in 1873, shipping times still made the delivery of supplies from Britain impractical).⁵⁶⁰ Consequently, the distressed colonies had to look to neighbouring colonies and at times farther afield to the U.S. for supplies. In a fashion characteristic of the colonial reticence to engage in large expenditure even in dire times, the colonial governments sought to alleviate distress not by bulk purchasing supplies with public funds, but instead by temporarily suspending import taxes on needed items. The premise being that those who had lost the most to disaster could not afford to purchase needed supplies for themselves or for the African-Caribbean population (a concern informed by the racialised fears of unrest examined in chapter four). The removal of import duties cheapened the cost of needed supplies in theory allowing them

⁵⁶⁰ Ken Beauchamp, *A History of telegraphy: its technology and application* (London: The Institute of Engineering and Technology), pp. 157-158.

to flood into a colony in turn promoting recovery without large-scale colonial expenditure. This 'opening of the ports' as it was often referred to was an action taken following hurricanes in 1827, 1831, 1834, 1835, 1866 and after the earthquake of 1843.

Therefore there can be little doubt of the ubiquity of its place as a colonial response to disaster, but it was one that had limited effectiveness. Despite the removal of duties, supplies imported from other colonies or bought from U.S. vessels in the region still cost money, leaving those with limited or no income or those existing on incomes considered marginal little recourse to avail themselves of these supplies.

Whilst large-scale expenditure had to be negotiated with Parliament it appears that it was acceptable for a Governor to sanction the removal of import duties. However, it was rarely a problem-free process and was easily open to exploitation by opportunistic merchants and others who could afford provisions. On 27 August 1827 following a hurricane on the island of Saint Christopher, the Governor removed import duties on timber, shingles and multiple forms of edible provisions such as salt beef that was easily transportable.⁵⁶¹ This removal of duties was intended to extend until 27 November. However, a communication between a colonial agent and the President of the island's assembly on 6 November suggests this action may have been reconsidered.⁵⁶² By that month individuals had already been caught importing supplies at a reduced price and reselling them to other colonies for profit.⁵⁶³ Similarly, in 1835, Antigua's Governor Evan Macgregor issued a proclamation allowing the opening of the island's ports. He was later forced to travel to nearby Monserrat when it was

⁵⁶¹ TNA, T1/4395, Proclamation authored by William Thompson, 27 August, 1827.

⁵⁶² TNA, T1/4396 Long Papers, bundle 852, part 2: West Indies relief, Huskisson to Rautins, 6 November, 1827

⁵⁶³ Ibid.

reported that its legislature were attempting use his proclamation to justify the removal of import duties on the island despite it being unaffected by the hurricane.⁵⁶⁴

In the events that followed the Barbadian hurricane of 1831 we can perhaps see the clearest example of how this coping strategy of opening the ports could potentially be exploited to personally enrich the planter class. From the outset of their first meetings following the hurricane Barbados' planter-dominated Assembly pushed for the removal of tariff barriers under the guise of it being for the overall benefit of relief. They argued for the removal of the 4.5% export tax imposed on all the island's produce which to their mind had 'previous to this misfortune impoverished us'.⁵⁶⁵ They argued that because of present circumstances they were unable to pay the tax and to enhance their argument posited the tax as universally unfair which rendered both 'master and slave the victims of a misconceived and onerous policy'.⁵⁶⁶ That the planters in the Assembly sought to dress up their request for the removal of tariffs as somehow beneficial to the enslaved population as well demonstrates how they attempted a cynical, rhetorical fight against the opprobrium levelled at them by the abolitionist movement. In a move that had significant history in the region and would be frequently replicated in many disaster aftermaths, the planters were attempting to position themselves effectively as paternalistic guardians looking out for the welfare of enslaved peoples.

Even the very structure of their petitions to the King belied the Plantocracy's desire to use the hurricane as an opportunity to advance a long-term economic strategy. In the Assembly's first petition to the King, the issue of export tariffs came before any other request for relief as well as being pointedly specific (the 4.5% export tax imposed by Charles II was

⁵⁶⁴ TNA, CO 71/79, Macgregor to Glenelg, 22 August, 1835; Macgregor to Glenelg, October (without date), 1835.

⁵⁶⁵ TNA, CO 31/51, Assembly, 6 September, 1831.

⁵⁶⁶ TNA, CO 31/51, Assembly, 23 August, 1831.

singled out).⁵⁶⁷ In contrast, their call for relief came later in the petition calling for the monarch to ‘grant such other relief as in your Majesty’s wisdom shall seem best calculated to’, a call considerably more generalised which left it to the King’s discretion to decide its scope.⁵⁶⁸ Placing the request for the removal of the export tariff before a call for relief at that very moment is interesting as, given that nearly all sugar manufactories were destroyed and the high destruction of the current cane crop, Barbados was in no position to export any taxable sugar. If anything, Barbados was in dire need of immediate and direct financial relief in the form of loans or grants. Consequently, it becomes clear that the call for the removal of tariffs was not a reaction to Barbados’ immediate situation but instead reflective of desires they had previous to the hurricane and formed part of the Plantocracy’s long-term survival strategy. The extent to which hurricane relief could aid genuine suffering was undermined as it became co-opted by planter politicking.

In 1831, Barbados’ ports were eventually opened to bring in essential construction materials and provisions, still the Colonial Office warned colonial agent James Stewart that duty-free imports must at no point be re-exported for profit.⁵⁶⁹ That this was the point stressed by the colonial office is demonstrative of the fact that their primary concern was not the effectiveness of relief but rather that no individual should use colonial largesse to enrich themselves. Here the role the self-financing ideology played in shaping relief is clear. The colonial office appears to have cared that relief was delivered to Barbados, as if it was not it would have definitely affected long-term economic returns. However, it was also important that it was *sold* and at a reasonable price, for if priced too high or freely distributed it risked incurring a deficit in the colony’s finances.⁵⁷⁰

⁵⁶⁷ TNA, CO 31/51, Assembly, 6 September, 1831.

⁵⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁶⁹ TNA, T1/4395, Howith to Stewart, 5 October, 1831.

⁵⁷⁰ TNA, CO 23/185, Rawson to Carnarvon, 17 October, 1866.

The consequence of opening a colony's ports was obviously reduced tax revenues for the period that they were open. However, again demonstrating the extent to which the idea that colonialism was to be a 'self-financing enterprise', shaped British relief, the colony itself was expected to make back these revenues despite this obviously being a course of action undertaken in times of distress. There were also genuine attempts to alleviate suffering. In 1832 in addition to a loan, Parliament awarded Barbados a grant of £50,000 specifically for those without the necessary security or means of paying the interest on colonial loans i.e. the island's enslaved, poor white and free populations. However, these genuine attempts were easily undermined. The opening of the island's ports left it with a not inconsiderable £10,202 tax deficit which the colonial agents resolved by spending a portion of the Parliamentary grant.⁵⁷¹ Money intended for the poorest was redirected to pay off the losses incurred by an action taken so that provisions could be not freely distributed but instead sold to the poor. In effect, at least in 1831, these actions meant that the already disadvantaged effectively suffered doubly; they had to purchase imported supplies and money intended for their relief was redirected to balance Barbados' accounts.

Consequently, there can be little doubt that, as demonstrated by the frequency with which ports had to be opened, the vulnerabilities engendered by plantation agriculture complicated and prolonged post-disaster recovery in the region. Even when the loss of edible provisions was not an immediate issue as was the case in 1843 following the earthquake on Antigua, imports of timber were still needed. Antigua's Assembly argued that the immediate importation of timber should be the Governor's primary concern and vessels were despatched from the island to Porto Rico at the expense of the public purse to remedy the shortage.⁵⁷² It is also worth noting that because of the proximity of British colonies in the region and the

⁵⁷¹ TNA, T1/4395, Mayers to Commissioners for West Indian Relief, 8 July, 1834.

⁵⁷² TNA, CO 7/74 (Antigua & Montserrat), Correspondence, Original – Secretary of State: Despatches, Fought to Lord Stanley, 10 February, 1843.

predominance of plantation agriculture on all British colonies, the opening of ports to procure items such as timber was at times rendered even more difficult. In 1831, the hurricane that did so much damage to Barbados also severely affected the neighbouring colonies in the Lesser Antilles. This meant that when Barbados desperately needed timber, close islands such as St Vincent were unable to provide any because similarly the same hurricane had also robbed them of their own supply so shrunken by deforestation.⁵⁷³

Though it was without doubt necessary to import supplies (they certainly did go some way to alleviating suffering), in all of these cases it can be seen that often it was done in a manner that limited the long-term expenditure incurred by the wealthiest of the colony and disproportionately disadvantaged the poorest who had little other choice but to purchase the imports. It is in the actions of Governor of the Bahamas Rawson Rawson in 1866 that we can see this intentional structuring of the relief imports clearest. In the wake of the hurricane, Rawson sent a boat to Cuba to collect seed corn and cotton seed; crucially Rawson stated that it was his intent to freely distribute the cotton seed and sell the seed corn.⁵⁷⁴ That which in the long run rendered the colonial government profit (and also set the labouring population back to work) was distributed freely and that which potentially ensured their survival was sold to them. It is worth noting that officer's marginalia, alongside communications between Rawson and the Colonial Office, shows the extent to which they approved of Rawson's actions.⁵⁷⁵ The events of 1866 again reflect the extent to which limiting expenditure was a primary shaper of the contours of relief.

Though the colonies that were dominated by plantation agriculture remained vulnerable and reliant on imports in periods of crisis, the importation of provisions got easier

⁵⁷³ *PP*, HoC [197], p. 8, Hill to Goderich, 27 August, 1831.

⁵⁷⁴ TNA, CO 23/185, Rawson to Earl of Carnarvon, 17 October, 1866.

⁵⁷⁵ TNA, CO 23/185, undated note on the reverse of Rawson to Earl of Carnarvon, 17 October, 1866. 'The Gov. seems to have met the emergency with much alacrity and judgement. I think his proceedings should be commended.'

as the nineteenth century progressed and Britain moved away from mercantilist principles. In the case of the hurricane of 1898, the unaffected colonies of Trinidad and Grenada supplied food to Barbados and St Vincent without condition.⁵⁷⁶ Bermuda supplied tents to Kingston after the earthquake of 1907 without a wider discussion on tariff removal or recompense to the donors.⁵⁷⁷ Ultimately, as we can see in the majority of the cases examined so far, but particularly in 1831, the importation of provisions was something that largely benefitted white elites who frequently sought to exploit crises to their benefit. It was consistently moulded in a manner to benefit the vested interests in the Caribbean colonies for whom the relief of genuine suffering was a secondary priority. Nowhere can this underpinning motive be clearer seen than in the process of petitioning Parliament for relief.

5.2 ‘Your humble memorialists’: Petitioning for Parliamentary relief.

Whilst the arrival of much needed provisions and construction materials definitely meant that British colonies avoided significantly higher death tolls from exposure and starvation, imports were not enough to allow these colonies to truly recover from the impacts they sustained. Consequently, external aid from Britain was required, but it was aid whose arrival or scale was never guaranteed.⁵⁷⁸ One anonymous Treasury note written following the Barbadian hurricane of 1831 shows that before losses were even calculated the planters were facing an uphill battle; a Treasury official wrote ‘I do not intend [the planters] to have a complete compensation of their loss but only a sum of money’.⁵⁷⁹

The large scale parliamentary relief following the ‘great’ hurricane of 1780 was a notable exception which Mulcahy suggests was occasioned in part by the severity of the

⁵⁷⁶ *PP*, HoC [C.9205], West Indies. Correspondence, pp. 3-4, Moloney to Chamberlain, 16 September, 1898.

⁵⁷⁷ *PP*, HoC [Cd.3560], p. 4, Admiralty to Colonial Office, 18 January, 1907.

⁵⁷⁸ Mulcahy, *Hurricanes and Society in the British Greater Caribbean*, p. 142.

⁵⁷⁹ TNA, T1/4395, undated note signed by ‘A’.

storm (there were approximately 5000 deaths on Barbados) but also the desire to support British colonists who, given their proximity to America during the revolutionary war, could have been left doubly vulnerable.⁵⁸⁰ It was more often than not the case that both planters and colonial officers had to work together to argue the case for parliamentary relief. This portion of the chapter will further show that both planters and colonial officials prioritised economic considerations in their arguments for relief, but arguments over exactly where they intended to direct money exposes often under-examined splits between the Plantocracy and colonial authorities stationed in the region. Rarely was relief quickly and easily routed to those in greatest need.

In the long process of petitioning Parliament for relief the first step was to estimate the losses occasioned by a disaster. Especially in the first half of the nineteenth century when the planters of the Caribbean were particularly powerful (at least in comparison to the latter half of the century) even estimating losses brought to the surface tensions between the planters, colonial authorities and the Colonial Office. Given the extent to which assurances to the contrary occur in communications concerning loss estimations there was clearly a strongly held view on the part of the Colonial Office that the planters of the Caribbean desired to purposely overestimate their losses. Consequently, in many instances those involved in the collection of information for the Colonial Office were at pains to stress that estimations were made by those ‘persons entirely disinterested in the...estates’.⁵⁸¹ Similarly, in 1834 Dominican planter James Matthews urged those at the Colonial Office to read the accounts of hurricane damage in the *Dominica Colonist* where they would not be exaggerated.⁵⁸²

⁵⁸⁰ Longshore, *Encyclopedia of Hurricanes, Typhoons, and Cyclones*, p. 246; Mulcahy, *Hurricanes and Society in the British Greater Caribbean*, p. 142.

⁵⁸¹ *PP*, HoC [182], p.11, Address to His Royal Highness the Prince Regent, from the Council and Assembly of St Vincent.

⁵⁸² TNA, T1/4397, Matthews to Colonial Office, 2 October, 1834.

The Colonial Office was acutely aware that many in Parliament distrusted the planters and were opposed to providing relief to the Caribbean colonies. In 1834, after three planters were chosen to ascertain and report the losses of the colony, their report was refused by Secretary of State for the Colonies Spring Rice as with colonial oversight he felt it 'lacked the necessary authenticity to go unchallenged in Parliament'.⁵⁸³ It was not unheard of for petitions to simply be dismissed out of hand if it was felt they purposely exaggerated the material situation of a given colony. Following a hurricane in 1817 the legislature of St Vincent had submitted a petition considered to be couched in representations deemed 'absurd' and 'ridiculous'.⁵⁸⁴ This rejection appears to have left an impression on planters in the Lesser Antilles to the extent that in 1831 they made clear their intention to leave their statements free of 'those hyperbolic statements for which St Vincent was so deservedly celebrated'.⁵⁸⁵

Estimating losses and writing petitions entailed walking a metaphorical tightrope; overstating losses could lead to dismissal, but underplaying them would have definitely precluded any relief. Consequently, constructing these petitions brought to the surface tensions between planters and the colonial officers. In the wake of the earthquake of 1843 the Governor of Antigua Charles Fitzroy, in communication with the Colonial Office, stated that he felt himself unable to supply them with any estimation of the losses sustained as he was unable to send officers to every destroyed property and trusted no one else to supply accurate estimates.⁵⁸⁶ When they could, colonial officers employed strict measures to ascertain whether claims were accurate or not. Take for example a letter sent to the Treasury in 1831. The letter details the fact that a gentleman called Joseph Moore was employed in 1831 by

⁵⁸³ TNA, T1/4397, Schomberg to Governor in Chief Antigua, 29 September, 1834.

⁵⁸⁴ *PP*, HoC [197], p. 18, Boson to Goderich, 18 August, 1831.

⁵⁸⁵ *PP*, HoC [197], p. 17, Boson to Goderich, 18 August, 1831.

⁵⁸⁶ TNA, CO 7/74, Fitzroy to Stanley, 20 February, 1843.

Barbadian officials to perform post-mortems on horses to establish whether they were killed by the hurricane of that year and thus were eligible to be included in loss estimates.⁵⁸⁷ In 1843, to potentially obviate such issues Fitzroy suggested that were the Colonial Office to offer a loan to Antigua he and members he selected from the island's Council and Assembly would be appointed to oversee claims so that no money was appropriated for 'speculative purposes'.⁵⁸⁸ From Fitzroy's concerns we can also infer that not only did he think that the planters wanted to overstate their losses but that they did so to personally enrich themselves.

It is important to note that even in the latter half of the nineteenth century when the power of the planters had waned, there remained a distrust of loss reporting from the Caribbean. What changed however, was that now the actual value of the Caribbean to Britain was called into question. Following the hurricane of 1898 on Barbados, in March of 1899 MPs in Parliament engaged in a debate on the utility of the grant that had been promised to the island and of the loan which had not yet been secured. MP for Nottingham and supposed radical, Henry Labouchère, not only argued that the reports of losses printed in newspapers were 'very greatly exaggerated' but in a manner that reflected common British views of Caribbean primitivism posited that even where there were genuine losses they were not of equal nature to that which might occur in Britain:

If you heard in England of 10,000 houses being destroyed by a hurricane you would stand aghast. But the honourable Gentleman who has just sat down will bear me out when I say that the houses in Barbados are simply bamboo huts...no doubt a great deal of injury has been done, but it is only of a temporary character, because these huts which have been destroyed can be built again for £1 or £2, and when we talk of people being rendered

⁵⁸⁷ TNA, T1/4397, Comptroller Office to Lords Council of HM Treasury, 20 January, 1832.

⁵⁸⁸ TNA, CO 7/74, Fitzroy to Stanley, 20 February, 1843.

homeless I have myself been homeless in the sense of sometimes sleeping under a tree, when I slept just as well as I could have done in a house.⁵⁸⁹

It can be seen that across the nineteenth century loss reports from the Caribbean were still distrusted even when the power of the planters had waned. There was no doubt a level of self-awareness on the part of planters and the colonial official that their reports were viewed with distrust. As a consequence, across the nineteenth century often the first communications that reached Britain from a Caribbean colony hit by disaster foregrounded the level of destruction. At times these descriptions appear to have been accurate; a number of eye witness accounts corroborate Charles Fitzroy's statement that following the earthquake of 1843 'every planter's house and labourer's cottage...is either totally ruined or uninhabited' for example.⁵⁹⁰

However, more frequently reports written by planters overstated the damage and sought to portray their situation as considerably more terminal. The aforementioned Robert Sutherland who wrote 'if we do not get relief I fear we must abandon our estates, and our poor negroes must be divided into lots and sold for the benefit of our creditors, and the families torn from each other' is an example of this tendency toward over exaggeration.⁵⁹¹ Simon Smith has shown that following 1812, St Vincent went on to recover relatively quickly. On Dominica in 1834 those in the island's Assembly stressed that were no aid to be delivered by Parliament, 'sugar and coffee cultivation must be abandoned for ever'.⁵⁹² Another planter threatened that unless the 'Mother country comes forward to offer help with a generous hand, the cultivation will cease forever'.⁵⁹³ A statement from a meeting of planters

⁵⁸⁹ Hansard, HoC Deb, 10 March, 1899, vol 68, cols 496-497.

⁵⁹⁰ *The Barbadian*, 15 February, 1843; *Weekly Register* (Antigua), 9 February, 1843.

⁵⁹¹ *PP*, HoC [182], p. 4, (Extract from a letter from Robert Sutherland)

⁵⁹² TNA, T1/4397, Government House Roseau to the Governor in Chief Antigua, 2 October, 1834.

⁵⁹³ TNA, T1/4397, Extract of letter from Peter Lesawy, 2 October, 1834, enclosed in Colquhoun to Rice, 14 November, 1834.

in Dominica's Government House reveals the economic argument they thought would best resonate with Parliament. Money from Parliament was needed to 'render the colony again a valuable possession of the British Empire'.⁵⁹⁴

At least in the early nineteenth century the planters of the Caribbean sought to stress in their petitions that without aid Britain was in effect in danger of losing a colony, one which through cultivation provided important returns to the Empire. Consequently, we can see that at least this aspect of their argument was primarily based on the economics of the situation alone. This aspect of their arguments is of further interest not least for one reason. If the situation really was as bad as they stated and if hazards reduced them to this point of near abandonment if not on an annual basis but every decade or half why, as was shown in the third chapter, did they not change Caribbean society to make it more resilient? The obvious conclusion is that these statements were hyperbolic; these colonies entered periods of decline, but they did not collapse and it appears that those in Parliament involved in making the decisions about relief knew this.

All of this is not to say that in the first half of the nineteenth century individuals did not also try to argue for relief because there was a need to relieve suffering. The economic consequences of the absence of relief were stressed but genuine relief was mentioned only in a manner that linked back to economic concerns. Planters both before and after the period of slavery sought to position themselves as the centre around which the colonies functioned, at least to the benefit of British interests. However, again underlying these arguments was the necessity of the islands as profitable economic entities and the planters asserted that ultimately relief not to the colonial authorities but directly to them was the only way of benefiting the African-Caribbean population. In 1843, post-earthquake, Governor Fitzroy and

⁵⁹⁴ TNA, T1/4397, Government House Roseau to Governor in Chief Antigua, 2 October, 1834.

the Assembly focused their energies on that which was most ‘worthy’: devising a means by which to harvest the existing sugar crop. It was deemed most worthy because the process was seen as beneficial not least to the planter but also to the merchant, ship owner and labourer. In 1866 Governor Rawson argued for relief for the planter on the basis that the labouring classes needed ‘people of capital or enterprise to aid them...stimulating them to industry’.⁵⁹⁵ No doubt Rawson’s statement reflects many of the colonial anxieties outlined in chapter four concerning the perceived ‘idleness’ of the labouring population, but they also speak to a wider theme recurrent in relief petitions. In effect, the belief was that the planter was deserving of aid, not for the general relief of suffering, but so they could continue offering employment and thus maintain the societal cohesion of the British Caribbean.

In the wake of the 1831 hurricane this line of thinking is expressed most clearly. In a communication in November 1831, Barbados’ planters, in their message to the colonial office portrayed themselves as the benevolent guardians of the enslaved population (something which as examined in chapter four their actions in the immediate wake of the hurricane would contradict). On 30 November a group of planters wrote to Viscount Goderich Secretary of State for the Colonies stating that:

The class of persons upon whose support the wellbeing of the community rests is composed of those planters whose estates have in the greatest degree suffered from the late dreadful calamity...since upon depended the subsistence and comfort of the rural community.⁵⁹⁶

The planters clearly were trying to position themselves as the guardians of the enslaved African-Caribbean population. The inference that can be drawn from this joint statement is

⁵⁹⁵ TNA, CO 23/185, Rawson to Carnarvon, 17 October, 1866.

⁵⁹⁶ TNA, T1/4396, Petition signed by J. Woodhouse, Holquhoun, Haran, J.P Mayers, H.M. Paul, H. Bouverie, P. Cruickshanks, J. Mayal to Viscount Goderich, 20 November, 1831.

clear; providing relief to the planters was the only way for Britain to also ensure the welfare of the enslaved population. And yet, the reality was that in Barbados these planters sought to exploit the island's distress as an opportunity to strengthen their own position. An article in the *Barbados Globe and Colonial Advocate* posited that both those who were wealthy enough to donate sums of money for the so-called religious education of the island's enslaved population and, strikingly, anti-slavery activists should donate to Barbadian planters.⁵⁹⁷ As the paper put it, 'We will soon observe the *real friends* of the negro slaves; whether the oppressed and nearly bankrupt planter, who struggles to feed, clothe, and educate him, or the enthusiast who, in his amiable zeal for liberty, considers nothing but his unconditional and immediate emancipation'.⁵⁹⁸ Again, as they had done when they protested against export tariffs, Barbados' planter Assembly incredibly sought to position themselves as having the enslaved population's best interests at heart.

In 1831 Barbados' Governor Lyon offered his salary towards the relief effort but crucially he only did so after he first refused to remove the tariff barriers.⁵⁹⁹ In this respect Lyon's actions can be seen as a way to try to ameliorate potential discontent amongst the planter dominated Assembly. The fact that the Assembly turned down Lyon's donation of his annual salary is even more conspicuous as in addition to the removal of export tariff they also pressured for the reduction of colonial salaries to supposedly increase the overall money available for relief and rebuilding. The Plantocracy saw reducing the cost of colonial governance a 'sacred duty' and they argued that colonial officers should like themselves 'submit to privation and loss.'⁶⁰⁰

⁵⁹⁷ *Barbados Globe and Colonial Advocate*, 25 August, 1831.

⁵⁹⁸ *Ibid.*

⁵⁹⁹ TNA, CO 31/51, Barbados, General Assembly, 18 August, 1831.

⁶⁰⁰ TNA, CO 31/51, Barbados, General Assembly, 23 August, 1831

They made partly reasonable suggestions that the salaries of gunners and others employed in the island's naval defence should be totally removed considering that many of the forts and guns lay in ruins. Also, they posited that the chaplains should have their salary removed because theirs was effectively a symbolic role. However, the other occupations for which they requested a salary reduction expose their true motives. Assembly members requested a reduction of the salary of the Protector of Slaves who was, to an extent, that population's legal advocate and applied some form of limited regulation to their living and working conditions.⁶⁰¹ They also requested a reduction in the salary of the Registrar of Slaves, a person who had both the power to fine slave owners for unregistered and illegally imported slaves and to free unregistered slaves.⁶⁰² It was William Wilberforce who in 1808 had first suggested the implementation of these roles and at that time had received significant opprobrium from those with Caribbean interests.⁶⁰³ In this respect, these requests can be seen as an opportunistic attempt to roll back restraints the Plantocracy had been chafing against for three decades prior.

In 1831, the planters characteristically attempted to paint themselves as honest and as wishing to guard against the possibility of exaggeration. However, on this basis they also neglected to present an estimate of their losses. This was arguably because an estimate of losses could have undermined their case to Parliament. In their supposed avoidance of exaggeration, the petitions of Barbados' Plantocracy sought to use historical precedent to portray their requests in a logical and unimpeachable manner. A petition published in the *Barbadian Globe and Colonial Advocate* cited Poyer's *History of Barbados* to assuage its

⁶⁰¹ TNA CO 31/51, Barbados, Assembly, 25 August, 1831; 'Protectors of Slaves Reports (Trinidad)' <<http://trinidadandtobagofamilyhistory.org/protectorsofslav.html>> [20/10/2017].

⁶⁰² Higman, *Slave Populations of the British Caribbean*, p. 7; A. Meredith John, *The Plantation Slaves of Trinidad, 1783-1816: A Mathematical and Demographic Enquiry* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), p. 26.

⁶⁰³ Beckles, *A History of Barbados*, p. 91.

readers that Britain would provide.⁶⁰⁴ In particular, the petition used a passage that highlighted Poyer's view that after Barbados had suffered a destructive hurricane in 1675 the imposition of tariffs through the Navigation Act had sapped her of her 'strength and opulence'.⁶⁰⁵ The petition included a further passage that included Poyer's view that prior to 1675, Barbados had enjoyed relatively unrestricted trade by which she had prospered and recovered from hurricanes easily.⁶⁰⁶ Thus it was logical, the petition argued, that in light of the 1831 hurricane the only way for Barbados to prosper again was to remove these tariffs.⁶⁰⁷ The paper was also keen to remind Parliament of the liberality it had shown in delivering unprecedented amounts of financial relief following the hurricane of 1780.⁶⁰⁸ Again, relief became the subject of politicking in which genuine aid took a back seat to individuals attempting to boost their own economic standing.

In the period after slavery Caribbean planters, on Dominica at least, walked a dangerous line by seeking to bolster their arguments for relief by painting themselves as the victims of Britain's decision to end slavery. As was the case on Antigua in 1835, some planters were blunt and simply argued that they deserved relief because the ending of slavery had caused them great expense, but others subtly resurrected tactics that had worked for them in the past.⁶⁰⁹ In 1834, planters on Dominica issued a joint communication to the Colonial Office bemoaning the fact that in the period of slavery they could have relied on the 'co-operation' of the African-Caribbean population to aid in the rebuilding the island. Yet, in consequence of the decision to end slavery, the African-Caribbean population who had only just begun to 'recover' from their change in circumstances could not be compelled to cooperate, whilst it remained incumbent on the planter to feed and clothe them and their

⁶⁰⁴ *Barbados Globe and Colonial Advocate*, 25 August, 1831.

⁶⁰⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶⁰⁶ *Ibid.*

⁶⁰⁷ *Ibid.*

⁶⁰⁸ TNA, CO 31/51, Barbados, General Assembly, 6 September, 1831.

⁶⁰⁹ TNA, CO 71/79, Memorial from the Assembly of the island of Antigua, 10 September, 1835.

infants.⁶¹⁰ These planters further argued that had it not been for the destruction of the provision grounds of the formerly enslaved they would have never even applied for Parliamentary aid.

Even in the period after slavery we can see that the desire to strike a humanitarian chord with Parliament was a tactic purposely used by those with economic interests to justify the need for relief. Previously planters had been able to use the enslaved that they ‘owned’ as security on loans and in the absence of that security they tried even harder to present themselves as simply requiring relief to help the African-Caribbean population who were of course denied their own voice in these negotiations. In the case of 1834, it is doubtful that even if the provision grounds of the apprenticed labourers had not been destroyed, the planters would not have applied for Parliamentary relief.

Through an examination of the three major disasters that closed the Caribbean’s long nineteenth century it can be seen that though petitioning remained an integral part of the post-disaster discourse, some of the uncertainty surrounding Parliamentary relief had subsided. Furthermore, through the growth of rapid global communication in the form of the telegram and an increased readership of print media, charitable subscriptions were frequent and significant contributors to relief funds. In fact, Simon Winchester contends that it was a nature-induced disaster that played a role in invigorating this form of charitable giving. Specifically, he argues that the eruption of *Krakatoa* in 1883 profoundly changed the world’s consciousness, re-acquainting people with a terror unseen for decades.⁶¹¹ Charitable aid from public sources was forthcoming from Britain following the so-called Great Hurricane of 1780, but no disaster of the nineteenth century came close to matching the loss of life

⁶¹⁰ TNA, T1/4397, Laidlaw, Dalrymple, Finlay to Rice, 1 October, 1834.

⁶¹¹ Simon Winchester, *Krakatoa: The Day the World Exploded 27th August 1883* (London: Penguin Books, 2004), pp. 22-23.

occasioned by that storm. For most of the nineteenth century charitable relief had rarely been offered, if at all, for the sufferers of nature-induced disasters in the Caribbean. There were a few exceptions, for example in 1831 members of West Indian Regiments throughout the region donated between one to three days' pay to charity and \$24,741 was subscribed on Jamaica.⁶¹² Additionally, the French also offered assistance, but it is unclear whether this was taken up.⁶¹³

Perhaps because the ending of the slave trade in 1807 and then emancipation in 1833 focused metropolitan attention elsewhere, the arguments that have so far been considered in this chapter did not take place in public. Relief was negotiated in an insular fashion between planters, colonial officers, the Colonial Office and Parliament; however by the end of the nineteenth century this had certainly changed. In the immediate wake of the 1898 hurricane that struck mainly Barbados as well as a number of islands in the Lesser Antilles, the need for serious external assistance was clear. The damage wrought on Barbados and St Vincent in particular was of a magnitude unseen in the region for many decades. Barbadians who had survived the hurricane of 1831 and were still alive in 1898 suggested that the latter was far stronger than the former. Despite the clear need, as ever both Sir C.A. Moloney Governor of St Vincent and Sir J.S. Hay Governor of Barbados still felt compelled to make a case stating the necessity of relief to the Colonial Office. Their initial telegrams in which they laid out their case are important for two reasons. Firstly, they are indicative of a development in expectation. Mulcahy has shown that in the eighteenth century there was frequent uncertainty over whether relief would be provided at all, and this thesis has shown that this remained the case in the early nineteenth century too. Moloney and Hay's telegram suggest that by the end of the nineteenth century, there was some belief that relief would arrive but that uncertainty

⁶¹² TNA CO 31/51, Barbados, General Assembly, 20 December, 1831.

⁶¹³ *PP*, HoC [197], p.3, Lyon to Goderich, 2 September, 1831.
Barbados Globe and Colonial Advocate, 25 August, 1831.

remained owing to a lack of certainty over what form it would take (grant or loan).

Moloney was clearly confident that relief would arrive as he wrote to the Colonial Office that to meet immediate distress he had borrowed from internal funds but on the ‘reliance [of] ultimate assistance from charitable or imperial sources’.⁶¹⁴ This uncertainty undermined the effectiveness of the relief as with no certainty of the source of the eventual relief, there could be no accurate estimate of its amount. Moloney no doubt knew that the amount of financial relief that could be raised through charitable collection would pale in comparison to what the Government might offer in the form of grants and loans. Consequently, ever informed by a desire to limit their expenditure, both governors were unwilling to spend more on relief than they might potentially be reimbursed, thus hobbling the scope of the initial relief.⁶¹⁵

Demonstrating the arguments they knew would most likely stir the Colonial Office to aid them, both Moloney and Hay, whilst mentioning the present distress of their subjects, foregrounded the ongoing economic plight of the islands as evidence for their eligibility for relief. Hay for example argued that given the ‘present financial situation’ of the colony, it simply wouldn’t alone be able to ‘bear the strain of [providing] relief’.⁶¹⁶ It is, however, in the wider appeals to public charity, specifically the Mansion House Fund, that their desire to foreground the economic situation of the islands is ultimately most transparent. The Mansion House Fund, run by the Lord Mayor of London, was periodically opened for philanthropic endeavours, and in the second half of the nineteenth century had been a key source of funds, taking collections to provide relief not only across the Empire but to other nations as well.⁶¹⁷ In the wake of the 1898, Lord Selbourne, urged the Lord Mayor of London John Moore to immediately open the fund on because the hurricane had hit colonies that it was well known

⁶¹⁴ *PP*, HoC [C.9205], West Indies. Correspondence, p. 2, Moloney to Chamberlin, 15 September, 1898.

⁶¹⁵ Richardson, *Economy and Environment in the Caribbean*, p. 92.

⁶¹⁶ *PP*, HoC [C.9205], West Indies. Correspondence, p. 3, Moloney to Chamberlin, 15 September, 1898.

⁶¹⁷ G.F. Bosworth, *East London* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1911), p. 208.

were already ‘struggling’ and ‘impoverished’, he argued that in that context they were deserving of ‘substantial and timely’ aid.⁶¹⁸

In 1898, the need for Parliamentary aid became acute because large-scale charitable aid was not forthcoming. In fact, the Mansion House appeal of 1898 ‘languished’, ending with a total far below expectation.⁶¹⁹ Extended throughout national newspapers, the official line run in support of the fund was that because of the imposition of sugar bounties, the islands hit by the hurricane lacked the funds to help themselves (this line sidestepped the fact that Britain had done nothing to oppose the system and in fact the Royal Commission report of 1897 acknowledged bounties as beneficial both to British industry and consumers).⁶²⁰ The Mansion House Fund went on to raise £38,500 (the cost of restoring peasant huts was estimated at £25,000 alone), significantly less than other recent appeals not even directed towards British subjects such as the £108,000 it raised in 1882 for the relief of persecuted Jews in Russia.⁶²¹ At a members’ conference on 31 October 1898, the WIC argued that the apparent lack of public sympathy was easily explained; the British government had failed to challenge the bounty system and the British people knew this. Those at the meeting argued that the British public were in favour of supporting the Caribbean colonies and that by failing to challenge the bounty system the government was therefore directly responsible for the region’s ongoing economic depression.⁶²² Consequently, the lack of public donation was

⁶¹⁸ *PP*, HoC [C.9205], West Indies. Correspondence, p. 4, Colonial Office to the Lord Mayor of London, 16 September, 1898.

⁶¹⁹ ‘Sugar, Labour and the West Indian distress’, *The Queensland Mercantile Gazette*, 4 October, 1898.

⁶²⁰ West India Royal Commission, p. 342;

TNA, CO 28/248, ‘The Bitter Cry of the West Indies: A Report of the Proceedings at the Conference held at Bridgetown, Sept. 3rd, 1898, of Delegates representing Jamaica, British Guiana, Trinidad, Barbados and Antigua, to consider the attitude of Her Majesty’s Government in regard to the Foreign State Sugar Bounties’, p.16;

‘The expected appeal from the Mansion House on behalf of the sufferers from the recent Hurricane in the West Indies has been issued’, *Morning Post*, 19 September, 1898.

⁶²¹ *PP*, HoC [C. 9205], p. 20, Hay to Chamberlain, 29 September, 1898;

TNA, CO 28/248, ‘The Bitter Cry of the West Indies’, p. 16;

Shalom Goldman, *Zeal for Zion: Christians, Jews and the Idea of the Promised Land* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2010), p. 79.

⁶²² TNA, CO 28/248, ‘The Bitter Cry of the West Indies’;

down to the fact that the public felt that responsibility for Caribbean succour lay only with the Government.

This same conclusion was also drawn by many contemporary letters sent to British domestic papers. Henry Blake writing to *The Times* argued that, as they had done after a West Indian hurricane in 1789, Britain should again provide the region with comprehensive relief.⁶²³ Blake took the view that Moloney and Hay had done everything they could to provide relief to their colonies and argued that it was in fact unfavourable British economic policies (no doubt the failure to challenge the bounty system) that had prevented them managing relief internally and left them dependant on external donations.⁶²⁴ He argued that in this instance, and recognising the monetary contribution the West Indies had made to Mauritius' hurricane relief in 1892, the Government should make up the bulk of the relief for St Vincent and Barbados. Similarly placing responsibility on the British government, a Colonel G.E. Boyle argued that given that in 1780, a time of war, Parliament was able to provide relief to the Caribbean, it was 'obvious' that it should do so again especially as it was a time of peace.⁶²⁵ An editorial in the *Morning Post* also implicitly suggested that because it had long neglected it that the Government had in this moment an elevated responsibility for the region. Further to this, the editor wrote that 'it would be a happy conclusion' to the region's recent woes, if the recent hurricane 'stirred' the Government to provide long-term aid to the West Indies.⁶²⁶

Barbados and St Vincent did go on to receive Parliamentary aid but the economic considerations underpinning aid ahead of the desire to provide relief for those suffering

'The expected appeal from the Mansion House on behalf of the sufferers from the recent Hurricane in the West Indies has been issued', *Morning Post*, 19 September, 1898.

⁶²³ Henry Blake, 'A Chapter of West Indian History' *The Times*, 9 October, 1898.

⁶²⁴ *Ibid.*

⁶²⁵ G.E. Boyle, 'To the Editor of The Times' *The Times*, 6 October, 1898.

⁶²⁶ 'The accounts of the hurricane which has swept over the West Indies are terrible in the extreme, and will excite universal sympathy', *Morning Post*, 16 September, 1898, p. 4.

become even clearer when considering the concessions Chamberlain had to make in 1898 to allow that relief. Namely, Chamberlain had to refuse relief to St Lucia and other smaller islands in the region. Having only sustained thirteen casualties and with the majority of its cane crop and its processing equipment surviving St Lucia appeared comparatively undamaged.⁶²⁷ On top of this, its cocoa plantations also escaped largely unscathed and these were one of the crops the 1897 report was suggested key to stimulating the beginning of an economic recovery in the region.⁶²⁸ Despite this limited damage, because the island was still suffering from ‘extreme poverty’ stemming from an hurricane impact in 1894 which had caused £4000 worth of damage Administrator King-Harman argued that without aid St Lucia would be economically depressed for the next decade.⁶²⁹

Despite King-Harman’s pleas, Chamberlain argued that St Lucia did not need relief.⁶³⁰ Chamberlain felt that the island’s distress was simply not great enough to warrant financial relief, to do otherwise would have set a bad precedent for similarly depressed colonies and risked flouting the Colonial Office’s non-assistance doctrine.⁶³¹ Arguing this point without appearing callous was easy as the island had grown as a coaling station and centre of ongoing military construction giving it an illusion of self-sufficiency. In reality though, much of St Lucia’s wealth was channelled away from the government and labourers and left the island in the hands of private business.⁶³²

Not only did St Lucia have the appearance of having enough resources to be able to effect a recovery without external aid, in comparison to larger colonies such as Barbados, it

⁶²⁷ *PP*, HoC [C. 9205], p. 8, Moloney to Chamberlin, 27 September, 1898.

⁶²⁸ *Ibid.*;

PP, HoC [C.9205], West Indies. Correspondence, p.35, Moloney to Chamberlin, 12 October, 1898.

⁶²⁹ *PP*, HoC [C.9205], West Indies. Correspondence, p.86, Enclosure no.1 in Moloney to Chamberlin, 7 December, 1898; *Ibid.*, p.120, Enclosure no.1 in Moloney to Chamberlin, 5 January, 1898.

⁶³⁰ Hansard, HoC Deb, 10 March, 1899, vol 68, cols 496-497.

⁶³¹ Peter T. Marsh, *Joseph Chamberlain: Entrepreneur in Politics* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994), p. 408.

⁶³² *PP*, HoC [C.9205], West Indies. Correspondence, p.120, Enclosure no.1 in Moloney to Chamberlin, 5 January, 1898.

had never been a large contributor to overall British wealth derived from the Caribbean.⁶³³ Moreover, its sugar industry had largely declined by 1884 and was not crucial to the function of the island's economy, leaving Chamberlain with fewer planters to appease and the existing ones with less leverage.⁶³⁴ By contrast, not only had Barbadian planters remonstrated against the Government at the WIC's October conference, but those with interests in Barbados had also repeatedly stressed the link between their prosperity and the overall level of employment on the island. Foregrounding this linkage meant that they were able to make a stronger case for relief on the basis that, as so many had before them, providing them relief was essential to restoration of 'order' or in other words the control of the African-Caribbean population.⁶³⁵ Whereas on St Lucia the decline of the sugar industry had led many labourers to move to the cultivation of their own plots meaning that planters on the island were less able to convincingly argue that providing them with relief was essential for the restoration of 'order'.⁶³⁶

Similarly, the fate Anguilla endured also reinforces the idea that economic and developmental factors were above all what drove Chamberlain to provide aid. Circumstances on the island and its recent history, which he would have been aware of, pointed to there being a clear need for aid. Not only had the island suffered a period of extended drought in the years 1897 and 1898, in the wake of the flooding brought by the hurricane Anguilla experienced an outbreak of malaria comparable to those in the most 'malarious countries'.⁶³⁷ Despite these circumstances and protestation from the island's authorities, Anguilla only received a grant of £300.⁶³⁸ Other islands such as St. Kitts and Nevis which had sustained

⁶³³ West India Royal Commission, p. 375.

⁶³⁴ *Ibid*, p.375.

⁶³⁵ *PP*, HoC [C.955], contains numerous communiques from Barbadian planters agitating for financial relief.

⁶³⁶ West India Royal Commission, p. 376.

⁶³⁷ *PP*, HoC [C.9205], West Indies. Correspondence, p. 75, Enclosure no.1 in Fleming to Chamberlin, 25 November, 1898.

⁶³⁸ *PP*, HoC [C.9205], West Indies. Correspondence, p. 75, Colonial Office to Soulsby, 1 December, 1898.

damage but had never been targets for Colonial investment were entirely disqualified from claiming from the Mansion House Fund; their case for relief was deemed not to be strong enough.⁶³⁹

Colonial telegrams in the wake of the 1898 hurricane showed that despite a strong belief that aid would arrive in some form, both Governors still felt it necessary to make a justifiable case for it. In contrast, on St Vincent following the eruption of *La Soufrière* in 1902, perhaps owing to the shocking nature of the eruption in contrast to the hurricanes which had become an accepted risk, Governor Llewelyn did not have to make a case for relief. Instead, Secretary of State for the Colonies Chamberlain instantly authorised Llewelyn to draw from St Vincent's existing funds to meet immediate distress and the Mansion House Fund was promptly opened.⁶⁴⁰ A further demonstration of the fact that the rareness of the volcanic eruption changed the scale of charitable donations was that the Fund raised £10,000 in just twenty-four hours.⁶⁴¹ The Fund went on to raise a total of £52,016 and was later augmented by further donations from other domestic sources; *The Mirror* raised £700 alone in its own appeal.⁶⁴²

Despite the charitable funds raised in Britain with the expectation they would be spent on the sufferers, the initial communiques from Llewelyn to the Colonial Office are written with an apologetic tone that, as ever, reflected a desire to limit expenditure. Llewelyn for instance 'feared' that his government would have to expend funds feeding and housing of a considerable number of the island's population.⁶⁴³ Similarly, regarding the Mansion House

⁶³⁹ *PP*, HoC [C.9205], West Indies. Correspondence, p. 55, Chamberlin to Fleming, 1 November, 1898; Linda E. Emeruwa, 'The British West Indies, 1897-1902, with special reference to the implementation of the 1897 Royal Commission Report (Unpublished M.Phil thesis, University of London, 1973), p. 127.

⁶⁴⁰ *PP*, HoC [CD.1201], p. 2, Chamberlain to Llewelyn, 9 May, 1902.

⁶⁴¹ *PP*, HoC [Cd. 1201], p. 19, Lord Mayor of London to the Crown Agents for the colonies, 16 May, 1902.

⁶⁴² *PP*, HoC [Cd. 1201], p. 57, Moloney to Chamberlain, 5 June, 1902; *PP*, HoC [Cd.1768-8], p. 51, Enclosure no.2 in Llewelyn to Chamberlain, 11 October, 1902.

⁶⁴³ *PP*, HoC [Cd. 1201], p. 28, Enclosure no.1 in Cameron to Colonial Office, 23 May, 1902.

Fund, Chamberlain himself said that he had initially not felt 'justified' in petitioning the Lord Mayor, but as the scale of destruction became apparent felt that he could 'no longer refrain'.⁶⁴⁴ The language of these telegrams despite the desperate circumstance further demonstrates the deep reticence British colonial officers had for large scale expenditure even when it was arguably essential. The eruption of *La Soufrière* and the instant expenditure authorised by Chamberlain in response stand as rare exceptions in the history of British disaster relief in the Caribbean. Indeed, the exception of 1902 is particularly striking when the Jamaican earthquake of 1907 is considered. Even with the total destruction of Kingston, a justifiable case for relief still had to be made. The need to petition for aid, even in the face of such widespread destruction and suffering again speaks to this idea that the desire to provide relief did exist but that such request had to be carefully justified to fit within the confines of the self-financing ideology. That in 1907 financial support only arrived after a lengthy five-month delay speaks directly to the fact that even when telegrams and steamships quickened disaster responses there were still other priorities, primarily assessing a colony's eligibility for relief.⁶⁴⁵ Even in the case made for the opening of the Mansion House Fund, the traditionally more philanthropic source of domestic charity, economic motivations were explicit: Kingston needed to be restored 'as a principle centre of trade'.⁶⁴⁶

In 1907, a central petition for aid was made by Bishop Nuttall, head of the Relief Committee and recommendations for pecuniary assistance was made by Sir Edward Grey Secretary of State for the colonies. The fact that both, later successful, requests independently touched on many of the same points demonstrates their primacy as the key motivators behind relief. First and foremost, Nuttall and Elgin both warned the Colonial Office that without significant financial aid, Jamaica, which had 'only just begun' to experience prosperity again

⁶⁴⁴ *PP*, HoC [Cd. 1201], p. 19, Chamberlain to the Lord Mayor of London, 14 May, 1902.

⁶⁴⁵ *PP*, HoC [Cd.3560], p. 150, Grey to Oliver, 8 May, 1907.

⁶⁴⁶ *PP*, HoC [Cd.3560], p. 9, Grey to Lord Mayor of London, 19 January, 1907.

following the impact of a hurricane in 1903 for which it had received no aid, would not return to solvency for at least a year.⁶⁴⁷ To neglect what they both argued was perhaps Britain's only profitable Caribbean colony would not only be politically disastrous, it would have serious repercussions for its wealth and social order. Nuttall in particular argued that if left unaided, cases of destitution would multiply exponentially, draining the colony's finances and forcing many Jamaicans into a spiral of long-term charitable dependence.⁶⁴⁸ As has been demonstrated in chapters one and four, not only was the idea of long-term state dependency an anathema to British authorities domestically and in the colonies, racist concerns regarding social order meant that the consequences of relief dependency were considered more severe when it concerned the African-Caribbean population. As chapter four showed, an 'idle' and 'unoccupied' labour force fundamentally threatened social order and increased the potential for costly civil unrest.⁶⁴⁹

Though the traditional Plantocracy of the nineteenth century had faded, the WIC still played a substantial role acting as a political pressure group for those with economic interests in the Caribbean region. In the aftermath of the earthquake the WIC played a significant role in petitioning Parliament for aid, and predictably, in the arguments they made for relief they above all stressed both the short- and long-term economic benefits that providing Kingston with relief would have. In the short term they argued that financial aid directed into the hands of Kingston's elite would allow them to begin re-employing the labouring population, something they suggested would alleviate the same social concerns Elgin and Nuttall had separately highlighted.⁶⁵⁰ In the medium term, they argued that this re-invigoration of employment would also benefit British interests by helping to stem the flow of labourers to

⁶⁴⁷ *PP*, HoC [Cd.3560], p. 140, Colonial Office to Treasury, 22 April, 1907.

⁶⁴⁸ *PP*, HoC [Cd.3560], p. 112, Enclosure no.1 in The Archbishop of the West Indies to Colonial Office, 2 April, 1907.

⁶⁴⁹ Sir Charles Bruce, *The Broad Stone of Empire*, 2 vols, (London: Macmillan, 1910), I, p. 311-312.

⁶⁵⁰ TNA, CO137/661, McNeil to The Secretary of State, 7 February, 1907.

the Panama Canal, advantaging British businesses whilst disadvantaging the now U.S. owned Panama Canal Construction Company. In the long term the WIC were anxious to see Jamaica's capital restored to allow their interests to benefit from its advantageous position so close to the Panama Canal. It is also worth noting that though largely a self-interested group, it was the WIC that lobbied for the use of Milne's work on construction in seismic areas to be drawn on in the rebuilding of the city.

This chapter has so far examined the arguments made by planters and colonial authorities across the long nineteenth century for relief following the most destructive disasters of the period. It has demonstrated that the thread running through this was a focus on economic arguments ahead of a desire to relieve suffering, arguments that resonated with the colonial office. There was a desire on the behalf of both parties, planter and Colonial Office employee, to limit their expenditure. As this chapter will go on to show, this desire directly informed both the form in which relief arrived and its distribution.

5.3 The arrival and distribution of relief

Parliamentary relief was generally provided in two forms. The most common was loans, which were on occasion augmented by grants. In the case of loans, the Colonial Office required security that those who were not land-owning planters were unable to supply. Grants were then supplied in rare cases where the immediate want of the indigent classes was deemed sufficient. When considering the arrival and distribution of financial relief in the Caribbean from Parliament, it is first important to recognise the length of time it took for financial relief to be decided on in England, then for that to reach the Caribbean and the even longer time it took for it to be distributed. The time it took for relief to arrive in the region beyond the immediate supply of provisions, can only have occasioned great suffering.

Furthermore, what this section of the chapter also shows is that particularly for the African-Caribbean populace, the distribution of relief was nearly always against them. What is more, the mistrust between Parliament and those with Caribbean interests limited the scope of relief meaning that loans and grants often fell far short of even supposedly accurate estimates of losses. Consequently, planters and colonial interests were incentivised to find ways to limit the financial relief distributed to the African-Caribbean population in order to better cover their own losses.

As this chapter has so far shown, relief was something for which a case had to be made and communicated to Britain, and then Parliament's decision had to be communicated back via the Colonial Office. Taking the eruption of St Vincent's *La Soufrière* volcano as the first significant nature-induced disaster of the nineteenth century, the actual event took place on 30 April and the record of losses supplied by the island's planters estimated the total at £79,045.⁶⁵¹ An immediate donation of £2000 from Barbados' legislature afforded colonial officials the ability to bring in supplies to stave off immediate hunger, but as of 1 September 1812, the only aid that had been further pledged to the island was a donation of bills from Sir Alexander Cochrane, then Governor of Guadeloupe and its dependencies.⁶⁵² It was not until 22 July 1814 that colonial agent Frederick Nicolay was given permission to disburse the sum of £25,000 which Parliament had decided to offer the island.⁶⁵³

It is interesting to note that in contrast to many other incidents in which Parliament provided relief, the aid agreed upon in 1812 took the form of a grant. This generosity is even more striking when, as Simon Smith notes, it is placed in the context of the fact that Britain was at the time fighting both Napoleon and America something which would have normally

⁶⁵¹ *PP*, HoC [182], p. 9, Copy of memorial of several merchants in London on behalf of several proprietors of Estates in the Charaib Country, in the island of St Vincent.

⁶⁵² John Marshall, *Royal Naval Biography* (London: Longman, Hurst, Rees, Orme, and Brown: 1832), p. 265

⁶⁵³ TNA, T1/4395, Extract from King's warrant, 22 July, 1814.

constrained all other forms of governmental expenditure. St Vincent would have been a valuable acquisition for American forces, and such conditionless relief only helped to shore up the colony against possible attack. It is also possible that such a gift was made because this event occurred early in the nineteenth century: the disinterest that later characterised British attitudes to the region had not fully set in. In 1812, although records do not provide an account of the value of the bills donated by Sir Alexander Cochrane, it is important to note that they were allotted by Cochrane for those ‘in most need of immediate assistance’.⁶⁵⁴ The island’s Privy Council, which was dominated by planters, argued that these bills should not pass through the public treasury and be distributed by colonial officials but rather be offered to the sufferers directly.⁶⁵⁵ In the case of 1812 the ‘sufferers’ who received all of the grant offered by Parliament were the planters, consequently one can assume that it was also the planters who were offered Cochrane’s bills.

Following the hurricane of 1831, Barbados’ losses were estimated at £2,311,729 and St Vincent, also affected by the same hurricane, experienced losses estimated at £500,000.⁶⁵⁶ Three months after the hurricane, a member of the Barbados general assembly argued that the privations of many were still increasing on a daily basis.⁶⁵⁷ Parliament eventually provided a grant to Barbados of £50,000 and to St Vincent a grant of £20,000.⁶⁵⁸ Still, it took a year for the distribution of relief to begin and even then, this was subject to a number of delays meaning that the majority of the money was not spent until 1834. Barbados had survived on American imports meaning that it had to spend its available cash. Relief was thus delayed by

⁶⁵⁴ TNA, CO 263/4, Privy Council, 1 September, 1812.

⁶⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶⁵⁶ TNA, CO 31/51, Barbados, General Assembly, 20 December, 1831; *PP*, HoC [197], pp. 7-10, Hill to Goderich, 27 August, 1831.

⁶⁵⁷ TNA, CO 31/51, Barbados, General Assembly, 15 November, 1831.

⁶⁵⁸ TNA, T1/4397, Lyon to Goderich, 17 April, 1832

a lack of specie and a fear that were £50,000 worth of bills to be thrown into the island's market at once it would 'seriously embarrass' the islands planters.⁶⁵⁹

The West India Relief commission was set up to aid the sufferers of the 1831 hurricane but as ever it was targeted specifically towards planters and went on to give £91,450 in loans to planters from both islands.⁶⁶⁰ The enslaved populations of these islands received no direct assistance beyond what the planters chose to give them. The poor white population did receive aid: men on average received 2s. 1d, women who had dependents received 3s. 5d, and single women received 1s. 5d.⁶⁶¹ Even by 1835 however there remained perceived problems with the process of distributing this aid, as Barbados colonial agent Lionel Smith put it 'the population of the island is immense, numerous poor families living together of the same all putting forward equal pretensions for losses, the labour of discrimination to prevent abuses required time, research and respectable testimony'.⁶⁶² It appears that the colonial agents involved in distributing this relief simply gave up. In 1836, Joseph Sturge also visited Barbados and later wrote that:

The distribution of [the Parliamentary grant] has been by no means satisfactory to many of the sufferers. It is complained that some persons of small property, who were entirely ruined by the hurricane, had no relief from it, while others of large fortune obtained considerable grants.⁶⁶³

Clearly the perceived mishandling left an impression on Sturge as in the same passage he argued that distribution of the fund deserved to be subject to a Parliamentary enquiry.⁶⁶⁴

⁶⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁶⁰ Smith, 'Storm Hazard and Slavery', p. 121.

⁶⁶¹ TNA, T1/4395, Table of distribution of relief monies, 1833.

⁶⁶² TNA, T1/4395, Smith to Earl of Aberdeen, 7 May, 1835.

⁶⁶³ Sturge, *The West Indies in 1837*, p. 144.

⁶⁶⁴ Ibid.

Similar injustices appear to have occurred on Dominica in the distribution of Parliamentary relief. Sturge notes that in 1836, planters on the island ‘openly declare their intention of never repaying’ loans from Britain and that they never spent it as intended on the properties it was secured on.⁶⁶⁵ In 1836, two years on from the hurricane, the African-Caribbean population were still rebuilding their homes and were compelled to do so without assistance.⁶⁶⁶ The uneven distribution of relief on Dominica is perhaps reflective of the fact that the planter given charge of the committee to consider the losses of the indigent classes was Dugald Laidlaw.⁶⁶⁷ Laidlaw had previously vociferously complained that the African-Caribbean population were unwilling to work in the immediate aftermath of the hurricane and had been looting planter’s houses (specifically, his brother’s). Laidlaw felt that considerably more ‘evidence and verification’ was needed before he began disbursement; perhaps it was this that gave Sturge the impression that relief had not been provided to the African-Caribbean population by 1836.⁶⁶⁸ At least in the first half of the nineteenth century it appears that money, where it was offered by Parliament, was not subject to stringent colonial oversight. Furthermore, loans intended as they were for the planters of the region only perpetuated the legacy of underdevelopment elaborated in chapter three. Loans had almost no direct benefit to the African-Caribbean population, instead they went on simply rebuilding sugar infrastructure as it was. The result of such processes left an impression on Western travellers to the Caribbean.

Travelling to Antigua in 1849, Robert Baird notes that he and many people in Antigua were shocked that Parliament did little to help the people of the island following the earthquake and hurricanes that struck the island in 1843.⁶⁶⁹ He noted that in 1849 there was

⁶⁶⁵ Ibid, p. 103.

⁶⁶⁶ Ibid, p. 103.

⁶⁶⁷ TNA, T1/4397, Lockhart to Governor in chief of Antigua, 29 January, 1835.

⁶⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁶⁹ Baird, *Impressions and experiences of the West Indies and North America in 1849*, p. 54.

still evidence of the hurricane all over the island.⁶⁷⁰ Yet, contrary to Baird's view that Parliament had done little to help Antigua, the reality was a little more complex. Parliament had refused the island aid following the earthquake of 1843, despite the Governor Fitzroy offering all the property on the island as security on the loan.⁶⁷¹ Later in the year, Parliament's attitude appears to have softened when Antigua, Nevis and Montserrat were all hit by a hurricane. Parliament offered loans totalling £150,000 to the region to be paid back initially at a rate of four percent and then ten percent from 1846 onwards.⁶⁷² In this context, Baird's observations of the physical state of Antigua in 1849 and the views shared by some on the island that Parliament did nothing to help go some way to showing that even when relief was provided, with little oversight in its distribution it was easily channelled away from those in need.

The conditions attached to Parliamentary relief could even make certain situations worse. Natasha Lightfoot has shown that on Antigua, following the acceptance of loans after a hurricane in 1835, taxes were raised on food and other essential goods to pay the interest that led to widespread hunger and eventually large-scale unrest in 1838.⁶⁷³ It was in consequence of the onerous conditions attached to Parliamentary loans that some even tried to resist drawing on them. Notes contained within records in the Treasury Long Bundles that detail the relief process following the 1831 hurricane suggest that there had been opposition to the imposition of debt by Britain on the islands of Trinidad, St Lucia and the region of British Guiana.⁶⁷⁴ In his history of Tobago, Henry Woodcock traces the course of the £50,000 loan offered to the island in the wake of the 1847 hurricane. He argues that parliamentary loans 'generally speaking entail much suffering on a community, are not applied to the

⁶⁷⁰ Ibid, p. 54.

⁶⁷¹ TNA, CO 7/74, Charles Fitzroy to Lord Stanley, 20 February, 1843.

⁶⁷² Hansard, HoC Deb, 9 June, 1853, vol 128, cols 926-8.

⁶⁷³ Natasha Lightfoot, 'Race, Class and Resistance: Emancipation and Its Aftermath in Antigua, 1831-1858' (PhD thesis, New York University, 2007).

⁶⁷⁴ TNA, T1/4386, Note without author, 22 February, 1833.

purposes intended and should not be resorted to but under pressure of the most urgent necessity'.⁶⁷⁵ Woodcock writes that previously as a member of St. Christopher's legislative council he himself worked to oppose the 'burden' of a loan following damage the island sustained from the earthquake of 1843. Indeed, it is possible that Tobago's planters felt similar to Woodcock as, of the £50,000, they only drew £13,200 and the rest seems to have gone unclaimed.⁶⁷⁶

Despite the onerous conditions attached to the loans by which the Colonial Office sought to recoup money spent on rebuilding, by the middle of the nineteenth century certain MPs expressed anger at offering loans to the Caribbean. Following the Tobago hurricane of 1847, it was felt, at least by William Molesworth MP for Southwark, that the Colonial Office had 'usurped' Parliament and offered the island a £166,000 loan. It is worth noting here that Molesworth is mistaken or simply inflating the amount to support his argument as all Tobago received was a £50,000. Either way, Molesworth's remarks on the Caribbean crystallised the opinion of many in British political circles on the colonies by the mid-point of the century. Molesworth said 'I utterly disbelieve that the West Indian colonies can ever be of the slightest value to the country...they have been the most costly, the most worthless, and the worst managed of our colonies, a perpetual drain on the pockets of the people of England'.⁶⁷⁷ In the context of this attitude, it is worth noting that following the Bahamian hurricane of 1866, the island received no government assistance. In 1866, then Governor Rawson set about correcting the 'erroneous' belief that the government was going to aid in the long-term reconstruction of the island and he actually set forth a public notice to disabuse the public of such an idea.⁶⁷⁸

⁶⁷⁵ Henry Iles Woodcock, *A History of Tobago* (Ayr: Printed for the author, 1867), p. 112.

⁶⁷⁶ *Ibid*, p.111. (in the terms of the loan, amounts totalling less than £50 were not allowed to be drawn thus meaning that it can only have been planters drawing from it).

⁶⁷⁷ Hansard, HoC Deb, 25 July, 1848, vol 100, cols 835-36.

⁶⁷⁸ TNA, CO 23/185, Rawson to Earl of Carnarvon, 17 October, 1866.

As has already been discussed in this thesis, the end of the nineteenth century marked a change in policy towards the Caribbean colonies. As Secretary of State for the Colonies, Chamberlain sought at least to restore the ailing Caribbean, and this is borne out in his response to the 1898 hurricane. That said, in 1898 Chamberlain was unable to entirely pursue this policy as he had to balance a number of opposing concerns. The need for relief was dire; the hurricane was regarded as the most destructive since the 1831 hurricane and was a disaster the likes of which the 1897 Commission had warned would permanently set the region back.⁶⁷⁹ The aforementioned lack of charitable donations suggests that both the British public and the planters wanted the Government to provide relief, yet these two parties were unknowingly at odds. The sugar bounties that the planters wanted either scrapped or ameliorated through countervailing tariffs were, as the 1897 report acknowledged, beneficial to both British industry and the consumer.⁶⁸⁰ Because it had none of the lengthy and thus costly transport times, continental beet sugar was far cheaper than Caribbean cane sugar. Further complicating matters was the fact that the 1897 report had deemed large-scale imperial loans to the planters of Barbados and St Vincent as too risky.⁶⁸¹ For example, the planters of Barbados were already so heavily burdened with mortgages that they had difficulty even obtaining the necessary advances to continue annual cultivation.⁶⁸² Whilst all the while, Chamberlain was constrained by the Colonial Office's sacrosanct policy that colonialism should be self-financing and thus occasion only the 'minimum of expense and involvement'.⁶⁸³ Indeed, of all the regions, as this thesis has so far shown, this adage had always been strongly adhered to in British administration of the Caribbean.⁶⁸⁴ For example,

⁶⁷⁹ West India Royal Commission, pp. 361-380.

⁶⁸⁰ Ibid, p. 342.

⁶⁸¹ Ibid, p. 355.

⁶⁸² Ibid, p. 361.

⁶⁸³ Marsh, *Joseph Chamberlain*, p. 408.

⁶⁸⁴ Benjamin Kidd, *The Control of the Tropics* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1898), p. 35.

in 1894 Barbados had voted to petition for a loan of £50,000 to help its planters, only to have it denied by the Colonial Office.⁶⁸⁵

Accounting for these opposing demands, the package of relief Chamberlain supplied in 1898 had many attached conditions. The largest part of the relief arrived in the form of loans of £50,000 supplied to Barbados and St Vincent which were for the strict use of planters, to be lent in amounts no less than £50 (the £50 minimum lending restriction ensured that the poor African-Caribbean peasantry were unable to draw on this money).⁶⁸⁶ Moreover, they were not to be used to shore up existing liabilities and repair non-hurricane related damage; any misappropriation of these funds was punishable by six months of hard labour.⁶⁸⁷ It is notable that the actual sums of money loaned, though appearing large, were actually half what the 1897 Commission's report had suggested would be necessary to restore Barbados and St Vincent to profitability even before the hurricane of 1898 had wrecked their respective sugar industries.⁶⁸⁸ Clearly, the loans were intended as a measure to ensure the survival of sugar production, but in line with the ever present attitude of minimum involvement, not to advantage it. What is also interesting is that the amount offered by Chamberlain, £50,000, was in line with amounts offered throughout the century, but where his response went further was in the grants he provided to St Vincent and Barbados who received £25,000 and £40,000 respectively; grants of this size had not been elicited from the Colonial Office since the 1831 hurricane.⁶⁸⁹ Following the earthquake of 1907, Jamaica received a grant of £150,000 and a loan of £800,000. It could be argued that this enlarged scope of relief continued past

⁶⁸⁵ Emeruwa, 'The British West Indies, 1897-1902', p. 118.

⁶⁸⁶ *PP*, HoC [C.9205], West Indies. Correspondence, p. 75, Colonial Office to the West India Committee, 1 December, 1898.

⁶⁸⁷ *PP*, HoC [Cd.9550], p. 21, Chamberlain to Moloney, 6 March, 1898.

⁶⁸⁸ West India Royal Commission, p. 401.

⁶⁸⁹ *Ibid*, p.75.

Chamberlain's tenure, but as this chapter will now show, relief in 1907 was directly informed by a factor up until now unconsidered: foreign intervention.⁶⁹⁰

5.4 Strengthening and weakening foreign relations

Throughout the nineteenth century, foreign aid played a minor role in British Caribbean disaster relief. In fact, it had only ever really been the U.S. which, given its position as the major power in closest proximity to the Caribbean, had been involved in aiding British colonies in the region following disasters. Following the eruption of 1812, before Britain had fully withdrawn from North America, the planters of St Vincent were anxious to restore trade with the northern ports as they not only hoped they would supply them with needed provisions but also knew it was the quickest way for them to revive their profits.⁶⁹¹ After Britain had withdrawn from America and cordial relations were established, American trading vessels in the region played an important role in post-disaster relief on at least one occasion. After the hurricane of 1831, Governor of Barbados James Lyon wrote that initial survival from famine and other shortages had been 'occasioned only by American aid'.⁶⁹² Later in a more minor incident following the 1866 Bahamian hurricane, two U.S. vessels of war helped repair government buildings and tow a beached steamer for which the British later thanked the U.S.⁶⁹³

Perhaps reflecting Winchester's assertion that it was the eruption of *Krakatoa* in 1883 that initiated a culture of international aid giving, it is not until the beginning of the twentieth century that we begin to see serious foreign involvement in disaster relief in the Caribbean.

⁶⁹⁰ *PP*, HoC [Cd.3560], p. 117, Colonial Office to Archbishop of the West Indies, 8 May, 1907.

⁶⁹¹ TNA, CO 263/4, St Vincent, Privy Council, 1 September, 1812.

⁶⁹² TNA, T1/4397, Lyon to Goderich, 17 April, 1832.

⁶⁹³ TNA, CO 23/185, Rawson to Earl of Carnarvon, 30 October, 1866; Minutes of Bahamian Council, 19 December, 1866.

As this chapter has shown, the hurricane of 1898 only brought forth charitable donations from countries that could be considered as within the British sphere of influence. However, this precedent was reversed following *La Soufrière's* eruption on 6 May 1902. St Vincent received international attention and a large number of foreign donations. A number of factors can account for this change from 1898: the volcano had not had a major eruption since 1812, a fact that perhaps meant that eruptions had not become a normalised and accepted risk of the region like hurricanes. Furthermore, *Mount Pelée* erupted almost simultaneously on Martinique, which undoubtedly also increased the attention the two islands received as many donations came in the form of money to be apportioned between them. Aid from foreign sources, much like that from British sources, was rarely solely motivated by humanitarian impulses. In fact, aid received from and at times given by the British to foreign countries reflects John Hannigan's interpretation of disaster relief through a classical realist lens. Relief is given when it stands to strategically benefit the donor. Hannigan uses the fact that England provided Portugal with relief following the 1755 Lisbon earthquake as a clear-cut example of this: England provided relief to Portugal as they were mutual enemies of Spain.⁶⁹⁴

When considering British relief across the nineteenth century, one of the most striking aspects of the relief effort following the eruptions of May 1902 is that it marks the first major instance of Britain providing relief to a foreign power in the Caribbean. This is particularly interesting when considered in the context of the conclusions this thesis has drawn so far on British relief: that it was tightly constrained in a manner to minimise expenditure. British relief provided to Martinique first took place on a regional level. Having received a telegram on 10 May detailing the eruption on Martinique on 8 May, Barbados' executive committee sent provisions, medical supplies and medical professionals in the form of three nurses, a

⁶⁹⁴ Hannigan, *Disasters without Borders*, p. 97.

doctor and two members of the Royal Army Medical Corps.⁶⁹⁵ This course of action had actually been initialised by the Colonial Office who asked that were the situation on St Vincent good enough to allow it, British ships in the area should provide Martinique with aid. Though it became clear once the British party landed that little medical assistance was required as the number of those who had actually survived was very small (owing to the speed of the eruption the majority of people were either unscathed or simply dead), British assistance was still welcome. The supplies from Barbados were delivered directly to Martinique's crowded urban centres.⁶⁹⁶

Hannigan's application of realist theory to disaster relief is a useful tool by which to understand the uncharacteristically generous aid Britain supplied to Martinique. The previous decade of Anglo-French relations had, for Britain's part, alternated between deep suspicion and ambiguity that came to a head in 1898 at Fashoda (now Kodok in South Sudan) when a standoff between the powers ended with an humiliating French climb down.⁶⁹⁷ However, at the turn of the twentieth century, fearing that German continental ambition would lead it to exceed its tolerated position as a 'status quo power', Britain lessened its commitment to the policy of 'splendid isolation' and pre-emptively moved towards repairing its relationship with France.⁶⁹⁸ In 1901 a form of limited rapprochement began emerging between the two powers, and specifically concerning the Caribbean, the warming of relations only accelerated as they reached an agreement at the Brussels sugar bounties conference in the same year.⁶⁹⁹ Consequently, British relief to Martinique can be seen as fitting within this pattern of

⁶⁹⁵ *PP*, HoC [Cd.1201], p. 43, Hodgson to Chamberlain, 5 June, 1902.

⁶⁹⁶ *PP*, HoC [Cd.1201], p. 49, Enclosure no.3 in Hodgson to Chamberlain, 5 June, 1902.

⁶⁹⁷ Thomas G. Otte, 'From "war-in-sight" to nearly war: Anglo-French Relations in the age of high imperialism, 1875-1898', in *Anglo-French Relations Since the Late Eighteenth Century*, ed. by Glyn Stone and T.G. Otte (Routledge: New York, 2007), p. 73.

⁶⁹⁸ *Ibid*, p. 73.

⁶⁹⁹ Emeruwa, 'The British West Indies, 1897-1902', p. 105.

warming relations. British aid was a vehicle by which it could continue strengthening its ties with France.

British aid however, did not end there and was actually forthcoming from outside the Caribbean region. Aid was pledged to Martinique by Governor of Mauritius Charles Bruce, a move that reflected the strong French ties to his colony. Mauritius had long had a significant French population, something that meant that in 1892 when the island suffered a devastating hurricane France provided the British colony with financial aid.⁷⁰⁰ In 1902, Bruce, by providing financial relief was in effect returning this favour, and incurring the simultaneous goodwill of the French government and, perhaps most importantly, that of his French subjects on Mauritius. In total, all of the British aid directed toward Martinique did not go unnoticed by the French and the country's President Émile Loubet sent a telegram to the Foreign Office stating that he was 'deeply touched by this new mark of sympathy'.⁷⁰¹ Loubet's denoting of British actions as a *new* mark of sympathy suggests that they contributed towards France's warming attitude to Britain.

Still, private communications suggest that the colonial, and specifically Trinidad and Tobago's Governor Moloney's, distaste for condition-free relief risked undermining this climate of rapprochement that was so advantageous for Britain. In the wake of *Mount Pelée's* eruption, refugees had fled to Trinidad and Tobago. Moloney, the Governor, argued that whilst he 'appreciate[d] ... their flight and their desire to get away', he feared that they would quickly become a drain on the finances of his administration.⁷⁰² Consequently, he requested (without reprisal from the Colonial Office) that the French government be petitioned for a remittance for their permanent care.⁷⁰³ Though there is no record of the number of refugees

⁷⁰⁰ Allister Macmillan, *Mauritius Illustrated: Historical and Descriptive, Commercial and Industrial, Facts, Figures and Resources* (London: W.H. & L. Collingridge, 1914), p. 6.

⁷⁰¹ *PP*, HoC [Cd.1201], p. 88, Foreign Office to Colonial Office, 17 May, 1902.

⁷⁰² *PP*, HoC [Cd.1201], p. 57, Moloney to Chamberlain, telegram, 5 June, 1902.

⁷⁰³ *Ibid.*

that fled to Trinidad and Tobago (Moloney himself notes that the overall number who even survived the eruption was small), the drain that they could have possibly exerted on the colony's finances would have been small. Yet, despite the scale of the disaster on Martinique far eclipsing that on St Vincent (an estimated 2000 casualties occurred on St Vincent in comparison to the estimated 30,000 on Martinique), the characteristically British desire to limit expenditure on relief shone through.⁷⁰⁴ It is clear through the events of 1898 that Moloney was concerned about dependence, but its re-emergence in 1902 is indicative that this distaste transcended conceptions of race; the refugees were in his own words the 'old established French colonists...possessed of considerable property'.⁷⁰⁵ Secondly, it also shows the latitude extended to individual governors and the extent to which they felt they could voice their concerns even when in this case it contradicted the actions already taken in goodwill by the Colonial Office.

In 1902 whilst Britain sought to use relief to strengthen its ties with France, other nations sought to exploit the need for relief doing the same not only with Britain, but also specifically with the people the Caribbean. The first foreign donations arrived from the Netherlands and Germany, two countries acutely aware of the economically depressed conditions in the British Caribbean. The Netherlands and Germany, who had both agreed during the first Brussels conference on sugar bounties to potentially suspend them, donated 1000 florins and £500 respectively.⁷⁰⁶ Belgium, acting to further strengthen ties with Britain, raised 34,000 francs for St Vincent in recognition of both British assistance in Belgian independence and its continually favourable attitude towards the country.⁷⁰⁷

⁷⁰⁴ Zebrowski, *The Last Days of St Pierre*, pp. 99, 256.

⁷⁰⁵ *PP*, HoC [Cd.1201], p. 57, Moloney to Chamberlain, telegram, 5 June, 1902.

⁷⁰⁶ Emeruwa, 'The British West Indies, 1897-1902', p. 98;
PP, HoC [Cd.1201], p. 38, Foreign Office to Colonial Office, 29 May, 1902;

PP, HoC [Cd.1201], p. 39, Foreign Office to Colonial Office, 2 June, 1902.

⁷⁰⁷ *PP*, HoC [C.1786], pp. 29-30, Phipps to Marquess of Landsdowne, 13 August, 1902.

Whilst Britain supplied provisions and a few medical professionals to Martinique, it did not provide anything on the scale of that which St Vincent would receive from Canada and the U.S. Since the 1880s, Canada had fostered significant social, political and commercial ties with the Caribbean and even went as far to propose, albeit unsuccessfully, plans for a formal union of Jamaica and Canada.⁷⁰⁸ Still, Canada strove to improve its relations with Britain and its Caribbean colonies, ingratiating itself with business communities of the region who up to this point, fearing British repercussions, had not signed trade treaties with it.⁷⁰⁹

In 1898, the Canadian government had extended a unilateral 25 per cent preference on British sugar specifically from the Caribbean as part of what it called its 'imperial responsibilities'.⁷¹⁰ However, this had provoked British disfavour; the British government denounced it as it allowed continental expansionists Germany to benefit under a 'favoured nation' treaty it had with Canada.⁷¹¹ Consequently, the fact that later that year, following the 1898 hurricane, Canada donated £2083 (four times the size of the donations from other British Caribbean colonies) and 10,000 lbs of supplies can be interpreted as a very direct move to repair relations with Britain.⁷¹² Though politically aligned to Britain, Canada was in fact the only country that was not a British colony to offer aid to the Caribbean.⁷¹³

In 1902, Canada would again provide aid to St Vincent, donating C\$25,000 as well as offering to cover the cost of shipping supplies from Canada to the island. These actions were not only a direct continuation of the overtures of 1898, but, when added to the near tenfold

⁷⁰⁸ Peter K. Newman, 'Canada's role in the West Indian trade before 1912', in *Canada and the Commonwealth Caribbean*, ed. by Brian Douglas Tennyson (Lanham: University Press of America, 1987), p. 112.

⁷⁰⁹ Emeruwa, 'The British West Indies, 1897-1902', p. 229.

⁷¹⁰ Newman, 'Canada's role in the West Indian trade before 1912', p. 123.

⁷¹¹ *Ibid.*, p.123.

⁷¹² *PP*, HoC [C.9205], West Indies. Correspondence, p. 43, Enclosure no.1. in Admiralty to Colonial Office, 20 October, 1898.

⁷¹³ *PP*, HoC [C.9205], West Indies. Correspondence, p. 208, Enclosure no.1 in Williams to Chamberlain, 21 December, 1898.

increase in the donation Canada made, were indicative of the changing contours of Caribbean trade. From the beginning of 1902, the U.S. government had pursued policies that actively favoured Cuban sugar producers, specifically it granted them preferential tariffs which, in turn severely disadvantaged British planters who had previously survived the drop in European demand by exporting to the U.S.⁷¹⁴ Consequently, despite having viewed its actions in 1898 negatively, Britain turned back to Canada to help its Caribbean colonies.⁷¹⁵ Therefore, in 1902 Canadian aid to St Vincent can be seen as an action taken with a view to cementing the inherently beneficial trade links Britain was now looking to it for.

Even more so than the actions of the Canadian government, it was the actions of U.S. in 1902 that truly risked British disfavour; they definitely walked a fine line between appearing as an extension of the rapprochement President Roosevelt was aiming to build with Britain and the subtle subversion of its hegemony in the Caribbean.⁷¹⁶ Strikingly, of all of the foreign nations that provided aid to St Vincent in 1902, the U.S. was the only one to do so first hand. The U.S. government expressed to the Foreign Office its desire to ‘share in the work of aid and rescue’ and said that it felt the disaster as keenly as if it ‘had struck its own people’.⁷¹⁷ Not only did it boldly deliver relief first hand, excepting the delivery of four Army Medical corps by a Royal Mail steamer, the *USS Potomac* was the first ship to arrive at St Vincent with any provisions.⁷¹⁸ The first British ship *HMS Pallas* arrived two days after the *Potomac* (reinforcing regional stereotypes of British naval punctuality) and the amount of relief it brought with it was completely overshadowed by not only the supplies brought by the *Potomac*, but by further U.S. support that continued arriving.⁷¹⁹ The *USS Dixie* brought with

⁷¹⁴ B.W. Higman, *A Concise History of the Caribbean* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), p. 234.

⁷¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 234.

⁷¹⁶ Willaim Tilchin, *Theodore Roosevelt and the British Empire: A study in presidential statecraft* (New York: St. Martin’s, 1997), pp. 21-36.

⁷¹⁷ *PP*, HoC [Cd.1201], p. 12, Enclosure no.1 in Foreign Office to Colonial Office, 15 May, 1902.

⁷¹⁸ *PP*, HoC [Cd.1201], p. 70, Enclosure no.1 in Admiralty to Colonial Office, 13 June, 1902.

⁷¹⁹ Richardson, *Igniting the Caribbean’s Past*, p. 193.

it 1234 tons of food and clothing for distribution between Martinique and St Vincent.⁷²⁰ The relief the *Dixie* brought was then further augmented by the *USS Sterling*, which delivered further provisions and medical supplies; taken together the U.S. provided enough provisions to feed 50,000 for 36 days.⁷²¹

In private, the U.S. went even further with its offers of aid. It telegraphed the Colonial Office offering to, in the absence of a British representative, protect its ‘vessels, interests and citizens’ on Martinique.⁷²² This offer can be read as a tacit suggestion that Britain was unable to fully protect its interests in the region and further demonstrates a growing boldness on the part of the U.S. previously unseen in the minor episodes when it had provided aid to British colonies prior to 1902. Despite this boldness, it is noteworthy that publically and privately in Colonial Office records there is no suggestion that this caused any embarrassment or frustration on the part of the British. In fact, colonial officer C. P. Lucas who was stationed on St Vincent stated that the island would ‘gladly receive and distribute any gifts sent to his care’.⁷²³ U.S. relief and British acceptance of it reflected both pragmatism and a growing friendship.

Exports of sugar to the U.S. market had always been and remained an important lifeline for the British Caribbean colonies.⁷²⁴ As has been already mentioned, the usefulness of this trade relationship also worked in reverse given that its proximity as a quick supply of cheap foodstuffs had been essential to sustain the labouring classes of the British colonies in times of dearth and disaster.⁷²⁵ Furthermore, outside of specifically Caribbean concerns, in

⁷²⁰ *PP*, HoC [C.1201], p. 40, Sanderson to the Marquess of Landsdowne, 2 June, 1902.

⁷²¹ *Ibid*.

⁷²² *PP*, HoC [Cd.1201], p. 61, Enclosure no.1 in Llewelyn to Chamberlain, telegram, 5 June, 1902.

⁷²³ *PP*, HoC [Cd.1201], p. 16, Colonial Office to Foreign Office, 15 May, 1902.

⁷²⁴ Emeruwa, ‘The British West Indies, 1897-1902’, p. 112, 211.

⁷²⁵ *Ibid*, p. 212.

1901 the two countries had negotiated a trade reciprocity agreement.⁷²⁶ Consequently, one could view the cordial relations between the two powers during the aftermath of the 1902 eruption in this context of rapprochement, but one crucial element unaccounted for is the colony around which this exchange was centred: St Vincent. The island was certainly important to the British but not to the extent that others in the region were, namely Jamaica.

Jamaica occupied a unique position; separate from other British colonies in the region, its economic prosperity was based on exports to the U.S. market, but it was a crown colony – the jewel of the British Caribbean. That Jamaica was economically dependent on America in particular had long caused much British official concern over the loyalty of its population to the crown. Following the earthquake of 1907, it can be seen how disaster significantly amplified this nexus of tensions. Governor Swettenham, in part because he subscribed to these concerns over Jamaican loyalty, but also because he held onto a rigidly traditional view of what the relationship between the colony and metropole should constitute, sought to retain control not just over Kingston's populous, but also over the sources of the financial relief offered to Kingston. In the climate of heightened tension, he refused U.S. assistance triggering a diplomatic incident that threatened developing relations between the two powers.

The diplomatic incident is the only aspect of the Jamaican earthquake that has received any scholarly attention and even then this is only from a single scholar, William Tichiln. His book *Theodore Roosevelt and the British Empire* is concerned primarily with American reactions to the incident. As a consequence, even on the most basic level this chapter, by exploring the British side of this event, can significantly broaden current interpretations. The 'American Incident' that erupted in the days following the earthquake

⁷²⁶ Robert E. Hannigan, *The New World Power: American Foreign Policy, 1898-1917* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2002), p. 60.

also speaks directly to the idea that the disaster exacerbated existing tensions and is further evidence of how far removed providing a relief effort was from colonial priorities.

Swettenham saw the U.S. as utilising disaster relief to undermine his control. As it exacerbated the tensions present in colonial-controlled society, the disaster exposed the difficulty Swettenham's traditional style of governorship had in adapting to the changing realities of British power as American regional hegemony increased. Fundamentally, the incident exposes the limits of Swettenham's latitude and where providing an effective relief effort to Kingston sat in the grander scheme of colonial priorities.

The incident was sparked by a telegram Swettenham personally sent to the British minister in Havana. In the message, Swettenham requested a number of basic supplies such as bandages to be sent immediately. Though HMS *Brilliant* and *Indefatigable* had been dispatched as of 16 January, they were not to arrive until the 22nd. Consequently, the British minister turned to the U.S. naval commander in the area Admiral Evans who promptly ordered the dispatch of these supplies via U.S. vessels under the command of Rear Admiral Davis. It is telling from the outset the extent to which the 'American Incident' was one sparked personally by Swettenham, as the Foreign Office praised the British minister's quick thinking in turning to the U.S. for assistance.⁷²⁷ Regardless, Davis landed in Kingston on 17 January and sent two forces of armed navy bluejackets to secure both the U.S. consulate and the prison on the recommendation of Kingston's police chief.⁷²⁸ Davis was warmly received by all the officials he met in Kingston, officers at the prison welcomed his intervention, and Macaulay on the *Arno* recounted their meeting as a pleasant one.⁷²⁹ Though patriotic ties no doubt played some part, the U.S. consul was conspicuous in his praise, he 'thanked god for [Davis'] arrival' and argued it alone had stopped Kingston's white population from being

⁷²⁷ Tilchin, *Theodore Roosevelt and the British Empire*, p. 120.

⁷²⁸ *Ibid*, p. 123.

⁷²⁹ Aulay Babington Macaulay, 'Account of Jamaican earthquake' 14 January, 1907, p. 23.

‘murdered in their beds’.⁷³⁰ Yet two days following his arrival and with great embarrassment to Britain, Davis was gone having been personally asked by Swettenham to withdraw.

U.S. assistance had never caused such an issue before. William Tilchin notes that in 1895 when a fire had threatened to engulf the Port of Spain, 200 U.S. sailors landed without prior invitation to fight the fire, and the British governor profusely thanked the sailors for their assistance. However, that is not to say that generally speaking asking permission to provide relief was accepted practice; when Britain ordered ships to Martinique in 1902 it did so on the basis that the French were asked first.⁷³¹ Similarly, at the same time, the U.S. had asked Britain for permission in advance of delivering aid to St Vincent in 1902.⁷³² This question of permission appears to have been particularly vexing for Swettenham. In a letter to Davis, he posited a scenario that reversed the situation: the U.S. would have issue with Britain providing assistance to them. Citing a recent incident in New York where a mansion was sacked by thieves, Swettenham argued that had there been British vessels in the vicinity it still would not have mandated their intervention.⁷³³ Given the thanks bestowed upon Davis by the prison officers for preventing a mutiny, Swettenham’s argument appears void. New York was not destroyed and the robbery was an isolated incident in a city with functioning law enforcement, whereas in Jamaica the threat of a mutiny in the penitentiary was real and the case for intervention clear. Swettenham did however have a more appropriate example he could have drawn upon. Following the 1906 San Francisco earthquake, which caused death and destruction on a far greater scale than events in 1907, the U.S. had rebuffed all British offers of aid.⁷³⁴

⁷³⁰ Ibid, p. 23

⁷³¹ *PP*, HoC [C.1201], p. 4, Admiralty to Commander-in-Chief, North America and West Indies, 10 May, 1902.

⁷³² *PP*, HoC [C.1201], p. 12, Foreign Office to Colonial Office, 15 May, 1902.

⁷³³ TNA, CO 884/9, Swettenham to Grey, 14 February, 1907.

⁷³⁴ TNA, FO 371/159 Political Departments: General Correspondence from 1906-1966, United States of America, Washington to Sir Edward Grey, 7 May, 1906.

It could be argued in contrast with events in 1895 and 1902 that Swettenham's personal concerns regarding U.S. intervention were accentuated by Jamaica's geo-political circumstance. The loyalty of the Jamaican population to Britain in light of expanding U.S. influence in the region had been a longstanding point of discussion. Writing in 1888, Froude noted that there were many Jamaicans who longed for American annexation.⁷³⁵ A contributing aspect to this social undercurrent was Jamaica's geographical position. Despite recognising the West Indies as a 'collective entity', Froude noted the distance by which Jamaica was separated from the other British Caribbean colonies: 'farther off than Gibraltar from Southampton'.⁷³⁶ Similarly picking up on this isolation, the 1897 Royal Commission's report highlighted how little contact Jamaica had with other British colonies.⁷³⁷ Discussion of this undercurrent in Jamaican society persisted not only into the twentieth century, but also on the other side of the Atlantic. In his 1902 book *Our West Indian Neighbours*, popular U.S. travel writer Frederick Ober clearly picked up on these tensions and perhaps purposely exacerbated them. He suggested that had it not been for Oliver Cromwell's 1654 expedition, the U.S. may have set the first flag in Kingston, as it simultaneously planted one in Puerto Rico.⁷³⁸ Articulating the crux of British fears, Ober went on to say that whilst its people were still loyal to the crown, they recognised the contiguity of the U.S. market, 'as opposed to the inefficiency of ... the little island 5000 miles away'.⁷³⁹

The answer to why Swettenham asked Davis to withdraw lies both in the meetings they had whilst Davis was in Kingston and in Swettenham's defence of his actions to the Colonial Office. In private conversation, Swettenham confided in Davis that from the outset it had been his plan to make Kingston 'relieve itself and refuse outside aid'.⁷⁴⁰ When

⁷³⁵ Froude, *The English in the West Indies, or, the Bow of Ulysses*, p. 159.

⁷³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 178.

⁷³⁷ West India Royal Commission, p. 388.

⁷³⁸ Ober, *Our West Indian Neighbours*, p. 129.

⁷³⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 128.

⁷⁴⁰ TNA, CO 137/660, Enclosure no.1 in Howard to Grey, 4 February, 1907.

defending his actions to the Colonial Office, Swettenham further expounded this line of thinking arguing that it had been his desire to keep 'Jamaica dependant on the mother country'.⁷⁴¹ American intervention presented a problem for Swettenham on two levels. He saw American intervention as a slight on his own authority, their arrival undermined his intention to make Kingston relieve itself. But perhaps more importantly, it clashed with his conception of what the relationship between colony and metropole should be. For Swettenham Jamaica was a possession, British property, and so American intervention was a subversion of British sovereignty. Indeed, his far more famous brother Frank would later defend his actions in this manner - American actions were in direct contravention of Colonial regulations.⁷⁴²

Swettenham and his brother were defending a far more traditional and inflexible view of imperial ties, one that with the British regional naval withdrawal and the shift of Colonial Office attention elsewhere they were in no position to defend. Swettenham's inflexibility in this respect was out of step with the more pragmatic view of the Colonial Office that in face of shifting regional hegemony chose to cultivate Anglo-American rapprochement. The question is then why did Swettenham have this more rigid conception of what Jamaica's relationship should be to London. Arguably, it was because Jamaica was situated at the centre of a number of overlapping geo-political tensions that had repeatedly brought into question Jamaica's loyalty to the crown. The disaster of 1907 brought these to the surface and magnified them, providing a unique insight in the complex relationship between Britain and the island and magnified many frustrations that important sections of the island's population had with British rule. Indeed the discussion of Jamaican loyalty played out in the newspaper coverage that followed the 'American Incident'. The British press deployed patriotic rhetoric,

⁷⁴¹ TNA, CO 884/9, Swettenham to Grey, 14 February, 1907.

⁷⁴² 'The Jamaica Incident', *The Times*, 10 July, 1907.

which at its core spoke of honouring Jamaica's loyalty and strengthening the ties of empire through relief. This passage from the *Globe* encapsulates the tone of the British press following the incident:

we ought not to fritter away over the corrupt and lethargic officials of China and portion of our charity when our own kith and kin, who have stood by us for centuries, are wounded, homeless, and starving...time and again Jamaica might have recovered her lost prosperity by seeking annexation to the United States...against her own interests she has preferred the old flag: now it is time for us to show her that it is not for nothing that she is an integral part of the British Empire.⁷⁴³

Similarly, the *Westminster Gazette* argued that 'Jamaica is part of the British Empire, and it must be our pride to come to the rescue'.⁷⁴⁴ Placed in this context, Swettenham's actions can be somewhat understood especially with the added complication of Britain's regional naval withdrawal. Swettenham was on his own, British supply ships did not arrive in Kingston until nine days after the earthquake. However, arguably, it was as a product of Swettenham's own misguided priorities in the immediate aftermath of the earthquake that the U.S. sailors looked as if they were the ones spearheading a properly humane relief effort. Swettenham had no concerted relief effort, but the U.S. provided one.

Given the near total destruction of Kingston there was a clear need for financial relief, but no form of financial package had yet arrived from British sources. All the while, the lack of funds in Kingston meant the Relief Committee had to place significant limits on the amount it was able to offer individuals to aid with rebuilding.⁷⁴⁵ Despite this, Swettenham had repeatedly turned down large sums of financial aid that were amassing internationally for

⁷⁴³ *Globe*, 16 January, 1907.

⁷⁴⁴ *Westminster Gazette*, 18 January, 1907.

⁷⁴⁵ *PP*, HoC [Cd.4586], p. 165, Enclosure no.1 in Governor to Secretary of State, 6 May, 1908.

Jamaica. C\$50,000 raised by the Canadian government and the significant sum of \$220,000 raised by subscriptions in Philadelphia and New York were both turned down by Swettenham.⁷⁴⁶ What is more, after the earthquake in the period when communication was limited and his dispatches assumed priority, Swettenham had purposely downplayed the scale of the damage in Kingston all as part of this effort to make Kingston ‘relieve itself’. Consequently, as late as 19 January newspapers such as the *Daily Graphic* were printing that ‘only a sixteenth of the town was damaged’.⁷⁴⁷ Swettenham’s downplaying of the scale of the disaster led to even relief from British sources being significantly delayed, as they were unable to properly determine the necessity of collecting relief funds.⁷⁴⁸

The unexpected arrival of the U.S. navy forced Swettenham’s hand. Unlike the international donations, Davis’ arrival was extremely public and Swettenham was unable to refuse it point blank. American intervention left Swettenham unable to control the narrative around the crisis. Davis’ report exposed Swettenham’s attempts to obfuscate the situation in Kingston. Davis wrote ‘the situation was far more grave, the calamity more sweeping, and the sanitary conditions in the city more menacing than I had been led to believe’.⁷⁴⁹ Contrary to earlier positive reports by Swettenham, Kingston’s hospitals were under great strain. Davis found many, as corroborated by the crowd outside the hospital Macaulay visited, unable to find any medical care.⁷⁵⁰ Davis had initially offered to augment the city’s struggling medical staff with the ones he brought with him, however he was rebuffed.⁷⁵¹ As a result Davis, ‘based upon the common dictates of humanity’, set about deploying the surgeons under his command to provide free medical care to all. Swettenham’s characteristic callous response was that it was ‘no longer a question of any humanity: all the dead died days ago, and the

⁷⁴⁶ TNA, CO 137/662 (Jamaica), Colonial Office to Treasury, 22 April, 1907.

⁷⁴⁷ ‘The Cost of an Earthquake’, *Daily Graphic*, 19 January, 1907.

⁷⁴⁸ *Western Press*, 17 January, 1907.

⁷⁴⁹ TNA, CO 137/660, Howard to Grey, 4 February, 1907.

⁷⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

⁷⁵¹ *Ibid.*

work of giving them burial is merely of convenience'.⁷⁵² When Swettenham gave the order for Davis to leave, Davis noted that it was an order that caused significant discontent throughout the authorities and it was not a position 'understood nor indorsed by the community'.⁷⁵³ Kingston's Mayor, C.W. Tait, even circumvented Swettenham, signing his name to a letter that profusely apologised to Davis and asked him to reconsider his withdrawal.⁷⁵⁴ Tait went even further and separately telegraphed New York and requested supplies, a request that because of Swettenham's actions had to be turned down.⁷⁵⁵

Swettenham himself laid out the fundamental issue he had with Davis' intervention: it was his desire to appear 'conspicuous in succouring Kingston'.⁷⁵⁶ Despite a dire need for extra medical support in Kingston, Swettenham only viewed events through the prism of his own authority. He saw Davis' arrival not as a chance to collaborate in the process of effective and comprehensive relief, but solely as an attempt to undermine his own authority and the populace's loyalty to Britain.⁷⁵⁷ It is worth noting that this was not the first time Swettenham had railed against U.S. actions in relation to Jamaica. In 1906, Swettenham had raised U.S. ire when they saw him as needlessly having obstructed the recruitment of Jamaican labourers to the Panama Canal.⁷⁵⁸ In light of this, it is clear that Swettenham's desire to place his personal pride ahead of relief for Kingston's citizens was the key issue behind the 'American Incident'.

There are also further indicators of Swettenham's culpability raised by assessments of his personality and first-hand accounts of his leadership during the aftermath of the earthquake. E. A. Hodges, an intelligence officer stationed in Jamaica who witnessed the

⁷⁵² TNA, CO 137/660, Secretary of State to Governor, telegram, 22 January, 1907.

⁷⁵³ TNA, CO 137/660, Howard to Grey, 4 February, 1907.

⁷⁵⁴ Tilchin, *Theodore Roosevelt and the British Empire*, p. 132.

⁷⁵⁵ *PP*, HoC [Cd. 3560], p.65, Enclosure no.1 in Admiralty to Colonial Office, 21 February, 1907.

⁷⁵⁶ TNA, CO 884/9, Swettenham to Grey, 14 February, 1907.

⁷⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

⁷⁵⁸ Tilchin, *Theodore Roosevelt and the British Empire* p. 119.

earthquake and the ‘American Incident’ first-hand, wrote an account never publically published because in his words: ‘the facts contained [within it] are unpalatable to many and in some cases criticisms of are made expressing view and fact against persons and doctrines’.⁷⁵⁹ Overall, Hodges’ account shows that he is no enemy of Swettenham, but it cannot shy away from highlighting that in the author’s estimation ‘Swettenham was a square peg in a round hole in Jamaica’.⁷⁶⁰ Hodges shows that throughout his Governorship, Swettenham had always stood aloof from the community of Kingston and crucially this attitude carried through in his response to the earthquake.⁷⁶¹

Hodges records that Swettenham was largely absent from his office at the time of the earthquake and that it was in fact his secretary Mr Browne who oversaw the government’s initial response. Crucially, Hodges relates that it was Browne not Swettenham who was the first to meet Admiral Davis and in this meeting a police officer arrived who warned of an imminent mutiny at the prison. Swettenham in effect appears to have avoided his responsibilities as governor. In his absence, Browne, because he was only his secretary, appears to have been fatally indecisive. Browne told Davis ‘I think you may steam your ship up the harbour and lay off the prison and we shall see how matters stand’; in Hodges’ words ‘there was no definite decision’.⁷⁶² Though we cannot say how this exchange would have been different if it had taken place between Swettenham and Davis, what is clear is that Davis exploited Browne’s indecision. In Hodges’ words, Davis turned to a minor official and said ‘well these officials don’t seem to be able to make up their minds’ and he was answered ‘well you had better act on your discretion’.⁷⁶³ U.S. action in 1907 was certainly bolder than it had been across the nineteenth century, but it was Swettenham, so out of touch with Kingston’s

⁷⁵⁹ JARD, E. A. Hodges, ‘The Secret History of the Earthquake’.

⁷⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁷⁶¹ Ibid.

⁷⁶² Ibid.

⁷⁶³ Ibid.

population and with his antiquated and overinflated views of British strength in the region, who appears the cause of the Incident.

Taken as a whole, the ‘American Incident’ demonstrates two key things about British relief following the Jamaican earthquake. Firstly, specifically in the case of Swettenham it is a further demonstration of how far the relief of Kingston’s sufferers was from being his primary concern. There are many accounts detailing how stretched the staff and supplies at Kingston’s hospitals were. The supplies, equipment and staff provided by Admiral Davis and his men were not only warmly received by the population of Kingston, they were clearly desperately needed. The fact that Swettenham outright rejected these crucial supplies demonstrates the extent to which he was prepared to place his rigid conceptualisation of British colonial sovereignty ahead of allowing an influx of much needed relief. The second key point the incident demonstrates is the extent to which the Colonial Office was more concerned with the possible effect of Swettenham’s actions on Anglo-American rapprochement than they were with Swettenham’s entirely lacklustre effort to provide any relief. The Colonial Office reprimanded him over the tone of his conduct with Davis, not his abject failure to aid the majority of Kingston’s population.⁷⁶⁴

As has been noted, Tilchin is the only other scholar to have studied the ‘American Incident’ in any detail. However, Tilchin’s focus is on Roosevelt. As a consequence, Tilchin tends to hone in on how the incident played out between the White House and the Colonial Office and its geopolitical consequences. A reading of the incident that focuses on ground level events reveals that the event was not limited to interactions between Swettenham, Davis and their respective governments but was also indicative of lower level Anglo-American tension in Jamaica. Though it is hard to discern an objective truth in the many reports, it is

⁷⁶⁴ TNA, CO 137/660, Elgin to Swettenham, 22 January, 1907.

clear that unlike ever before the ‘American Incident’ placed a British relief effort under significant media scrutiny. Indeed, the picture that emerged from U.S. newspapers did not reflect the supposedly developing climate of rapprochement that existed in the higher echelons of politics. As detailed in the *New York Tribune*, U.S. tourists were supposedly turned away from a makeshift hospital constructed on the docked ship the *Port Kingston*, and in other places refused help by the British because of their nationality.⁷⁶⁵ Specifically in the case of the supposed refusal of aid by those on the *Port Kingston*, British accounts such as that by Dr Arthur Evans dispute the picture painted by the *New York Tribune*. Evans, who ran the hospital, suggested that he and many Britons worked through the night providing aid to anyone regardless of race or class.⁷⁶⁶

What is more, one of Britain’s and certainly Swettenham’s worst fears manifested. Relayed in *The Times*, an article reported on a statement which ‘accurately reflect[ed] public sentiment’ penned by a ‘gathering of Kingston’s merchants’ who wanted to make known not only their disapproval of Swettenham’s actions, but also their praise for the prompt response from the U.S.⁷⁶⁷ The merchants, reflecting Hodge’s criticism of Swettenham, went on to state that the chief executives of the Government were ‘out of touch with the community generally’, ‘remote’ and ‘unable to cope with the current situation’.⁷⁶⁸ It is ironic then that Swettenham’s fears that U.S. intervention would spark a pro-American backlash only occurred because he handled the situation so poorly. Swettenham must have felt that in consequence of the ‘Incident’ he could not continue in Jamaica and requested his retirement on 24 January 1907. However, many were later keen to press the Government on whether old age was actually the reason for his retirement.⁷⁶⁹ It is also telling of the perceived stain on the

⁷⁶⁵ ‘Refugees Indignant’, *New York Tribune*, 23 January 1907;

⁷⁶⁶ Arthur J. Evans, ‘Experiences During the Recent Earthquake in Jamaica’, *British Medical Journal*, 1, 1907, p. 348.

⁷⁶⁷ ‘The Colonial Government Condemned’, *The Times*, 31 January, 1907.

⁷⁶⁸ TNA, CO 137/660, Enclosure no.1 in The Secretary of State to Governor, 31 January, 1907.

⁷⁶⁹ TNA, CO 137/660, Colonial Office meeting minutes, 9 April, 1907.

Swettenham name that a week following his death in April 1933, his wife and brother wrote a note to the editor of *The Times* in an attempt to justify his actions twenty six years later.⁷⁷⁰

5.5 Conclusion

The central conclusion that can be drawn from this chapter is that across the various stages of long-term relief - removing import duties, petitioning Parliament and later in the politics of international aid - rarely was the desire to relieve suffering a primary motivator. Beyond that, what is exposed throughout much of this chapter is the uneven relationship Britain had with its Caribbean colonies throughout the nineteenth century. Although Britain never offered a compensation package that matched estimates supplied to them by the inhabitants of the region, relief arrived in different scales and financial forms across the century.

In the early portion of the century we can see that in 1812 whilst St Vincent was still perceived as profitable and was one front of the ongoing conflict with U.S., it received grants (as opposed to loans) with little argument. Though it took time to arrive, relief given to Barbados and St Vincent in 1831 was formed of both grants and loans. By contrast, for colonies considered less important such as Dominica and Antigua aid was less generous; they both received no grants and only loans in 1834 and 1843 respectively. This chapter has shown that this continued to be the case for less important colonies as demonstrated in the case of St Lucia and Anguilla in 1898. However, at the end of the century those colonies that remained important to British interests in the region - Barbados, St Vincent and Jamaica - all continued to receive aid. In the case of Jamaica in 1907 specifically, the island received an unprecedented amount of aid; it is obvious that in part this reflected the island's development relative to the other cases that predate 1907, but in a trend that started in 1902 Britain was

⁷⁷⁰ Frank Swettenham, 'The Jamaican Earthquake', *The Times*, 27 April, 1933.

also responding to new political pressures in the aid giving process. As Lord Elgin wrote in relation to the ‘American Incident’, the provision of relief to Kingston was essential to guide it out of ‘recent embarrassments’.⁷⁷¹

What this chapter has also shown is that there was little oversight in how the money was spent. Had Parliament cared a great deal for the colonies in the region perhaps this would have been different. Instead, reflecting comments made by MPs Molesworth and Labourchere at the mid- and end-points of the century, there was definitely a strength of feeling that the Caribbean colonies were simply a drain on imperial finances that offered little in return. Whilst a case had to be made for relief, this chapter shows that more often than not, in cases of large-scale distress, relief arrived in some form. Given, as this chapter has shown, there was no oversight in the distribution of relief and it usually arrived in the form of loans inaccessible to the African-Caribbean population, relief in effect seemed to be a measure to placate the planters of the region. Thus, as was shown in the third chapter, the region ended up trapped in stasis and it appears that relief contributed to this. Relief largely seems to have kept the unsustainable plantation system afloat despite all of the attendant vulnerabilities it entailed.

⁷⁷¹ *PP*, HoC [Cd.3560], p.118, Grey to Oliver, 17 May, 1907.

Conclusion

This thesis set out to investigate British responses to disaster in the nineteenth century Caribbean. Starting from Bankoff's idea that disaster response is often informed by 'social and organizational practices', this thesis examined such practices in the nineteenth-century Caribbean context.⁷⁷² Specifically, how the planters and the colonial authorities, who controlled the British Caribbean related to its environment. This thesis then examined short and long-term responses to disaster in the region with a view to answering its primary research question: what shaped British colonial responses to disaster?

To provide the foundation from which to answer that question the second chapter examined how the British Caribbean was vulnerable to the region's hazards and how colonial social and organizational practices enhanced that vulnerability. This chapter concluded that overall, though they had differing levels of vulnerability to different hazards, the rural and built environments of the British Caribbean were highly vulnerable to the region's hazards. In particular, the unwavering imposition of plantation agriculture on British colonies spurred near permanent environmental degradation. Plantations expanded on the back of deforestation and their dominance over forms of subsistence agriculture. The labour requirements imposed on the African-Caribbean population, whether through slavery or notionally free labour, left that population with little time or energy to reduce their vulnerability. These factors rendered British colonies considerably more vulnerable to hurricanes in particular as food and material shortages threatened hardship and prolonged recovery for those who survived these events. Similarly, the built environment of the Caribbean contained uneven levels of adaptation and therefore vulnerability in particular to earthquakes and epiphenomenal fires, all of which increased the potential for loss of life.

⁷⁷² Bankoff, 'Historical concepts of disaster and risk', p. 36.

The third chapter examined why these vulnerabilities were so persistent in British Caribbean society. It concluded that the Caribbean was never conceived of as more than a land to be profited from. The plantation remained the only way it was conceived of that profit could be extracted from the region. This narrow conception of the region's 'usefulness' left a legacy of serious underdevelopment. In this the first part of the answer to what shaped disaster response was revealed: when hazards threatened the continued existence of plantation agriculture and the various oppressive systems of labour that supported it, relief was often directed to ensure it survived even when it appeared to a degree unsustainable. British responses were certainly informed by this fixed, exploitative view of their business in the Caribbean. The fourth and fifth chapters provided the other half of the picture. In the short term, colonial responses to disaster were shaped by an inherently racist fear of the African-Caribbean population and a desire to withhold relief, both to force this population to continue to conform to their colonially ordained role and to limit expenditure. Securing financial relief was a long term process in which human suffering took a back seat to the forces of economics and politics. Consequently, it can be concluded that the relief provided in many of the cases considered in this thesis was not a panacea for human suffering but a means by which to ensure the survival of British interests in the region.

In terms of this thesis' contribution to the existing literature, at the most basic level it fulfils the twofold contribution that Bankoff argues a disaster historian can make. It provides a unique window onto British Caribbean colonialism and further reinforces the notion that disasters are not simply *natural* but rather borne from the society on which a hazard impacts. Chapters two and three of this thesis demonstrated that at the most basic level disasters were not something that just happened, they were born from and prolonged by the extractive, profit-driven nature of British colonialism in the region. In particular, it broadens our understanding of the consequences of plantation agriculture out from simply causing

deforestation and soil erosion, and thus making clear the implications for human life.⁷⁷³ The fourth and fifth chapters demonstrated how a relief process skewed to support this extraction of wealth prolonged and fundamentally shaped relief. In this context, this thesis also adds to the wider discussion of the value of historians investigating disaster. It demonstrates how the skills of the historian can be deployed to uncover the historic human-seeded, temporal processes that play a significant role in creating disaster.

The second part of this thesis' contribution is that which it makes to the bodies of literature concerned with British colonialism in the Caribbean. It represents a significant widening of a sparsely populated area of literature. Before this thesis, Mulcahy's *Hurricanes and Society* represented the only comprehensive study of specifically British responses to rapid onset disasters in the region. Where Mulcahy examined the seventeenth century, this thesis examined the long nineteenth century, a period he himself suggested was ripe for study.⁷⁷⁴ In contrast to Schwartz's *Sea of Storms* which diverges from British responses to mainly consider American and Latin American ones, this thesis represents so far the only long range study of British responses to disaster in the long nineteenth century. Above all, British responses appear more punitive than any of their colonial counterparts.

Through its study of short- and long-term responses to disaster it adds to the body of literature that has sought to emphasise the aspects of continuity in African-Caribbean experiences through the transitions between the different forms of labour, enforced and otherwise.⁷⁷⁵ Chapter four demonstrated that across the period, in those crucial first actions taken by colonial authorities, enslaved and apprenticed peoples and later free people were always viewed as a group entity to be feared. Removed from that immediate post-disaster

⁷⁷³ John M. MacKenzie, *Empires of Nature and the Nature of Empires: Imperialism, Scotland and the Environment* (East Linton: Tuckwell Press Ltd, 1997), p. 15.

⁷⁷⁴ Mulcahy, *Hurricanes and Society in the British Greater Caribbean*, p. 193.

⁷⁷⁵ Richard Sheridan, *Slavery, Freedom and Gender: The Dynamics of Caribbean Society*, ed. by Patrick Bryan (University of the West Indies Press, 2002); Holt, *The Problem of Freedom*.

moment, there is also continuity in the fact that this fear soon morphed into a perception that a need for relief was a problem to be contained, limited.

Ultimately, for the colonial authorities it was more often than not a problem that was to be solved in a manner that forced that population back into their colonially ordained position as labourers. Such practices resonate with similar treatment that other British 'subjects' suffered in Ireland and India where the provision of relief was purposely tied to a person's capacity to work for it. However, as studies of slow onset hazards have shown, these responses were constructed over a long period. Consequently, this thesis expands our understanding of how British authorities responded to rapid onset disasters, showing that at least in the Caribbean this was done in an ad-hoc manner, but with a constant threat of violence. A brief reflection on the fact that armed personnel were deployed in both 1831 and 1907 demonstrates this continuity. One cannot help but reflect on the fact that fear of certain populations (more often than not grouped along racial lines) is something that still injects violence into modern disaster aftermaths. Chapter four repeatedly highlighted the colonial preoccupation with looting, something which was particularly present in 1907 when disaster struck Kingston, an urban area containing a concentration of colonial wealth. It is hard not to see the resonances between events in 1907 and that so racially motivated reclassification of New Orleans' black residents from survivors to 'looters' following hurricane Katrina.⁷⁷⁶ This comparison is not made because of what could be considered superficial similarities, but because it again highlights how inequalities in the configuration of a given society can both generate and prolong disaster. Such similarities also further demonstrate the value of historians critically engaging with disaster.

⁷⁷⁶ Colleen Shalby, 'What's the difference between 'looting' and 'finding'? 12 years after Katrina, Harvey sparks a new debate', *LA Times*, 29 August, 2017, <www.latimes.com/nation/la-na-harvey-20170829-story.html>, [14/05/18].

This thesis also contributes to our understanding of where the Caribbean sat in the wider network of colonial priorities in the nineteenth century. Chapter three in particular highlighted the economic stasis in which the Caribbean was effectively kept while plantation agriculture remained its dominant industry. Though by no means taking British colonial development at face value as an entirely positive exercise, it can certainly be argued that the Caribbean languished in contrast to other colonies such as India; the storm detection network built in India based on knowledge obtained from the Caribbean is a prime example of that. As reflected by the parliamentary discourse following the hurricane of 1898, it is clear that for some that the Caribbean colonies were still seen as ‘millstones’ around Britain’s neck.⁷⁷⁷ As a rebuttal, one could argue that in the large cases of disaster considered in this thesis, more often than not Parliament provided relief to its Caribbean colonies. This is true, but this money appears to have rarely matched losses and appears as a tactic to placate private economic interests. That the process of petitioning for relief also often occasioned friction between planters, colonial authorities and those in Parliament goes some way to deconstructing the notion that British Caribbean colonial practices all came from the same monolithic entity.⁷⁷⁸ Relief often exposed fractures within colonial circles.

From this work there are two key directions for further research. First, within the same temporal bounds of this study there is strong potential for comparative studies both within the Caribbean and in the wider context of the British Empire. In the context of the Caribbean, this research would work well as a starting point for cross-comparison with French colonial responses to disaster, particularly because, as the third chapter of this thesis showed, they had such a different relationship with the region. Furthermore, as both Church and Bertrand Taith have shown, in the Caribbean and its wider empire France had a more

⁷⁷⁷ Stanley R. Stemberge, ‘Disraeli and the Millstones’, *Journal of British Studies*, 5.1 (1965), pp. 122–39.

⁷⁷⁸ Ann Laura Stoler, ‘Rethinking Colonial Categories: European Communities and the Boundaries of Rule’, *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 31.1 (1989), pp. 135–36.

complex relationship than Britain with the concept of humanitarianism.⁷⁷⁹ In the wider context of the British Empire, in light of the cyclonic storm detection discussed in the third chapter, comparisons in particular with British-controlled India would also seem a fertile ground for further research. This would also go some way to broadening the existing literature on British responses to hazards in India, which has primarily focused on responses to famine.

The second direction for further investigation based on this research would be to consider if, and by extension how, British responses to disaster in the Caribbean changed in the twentieth century. This would be a particularly fruitful direction for two reasons. First, it would be interesting to understand how trends identified in this thesis, such as a growing international awareness of disaster and the integration of science into disaster response, developed. The second aspect of interest in such a study would be the effect of decolonisation on disaster response, in particular it would be of great value to further unpick what exactly the legacy of British colonialism was for disaster vulnerability, resilience and response in the region. Unpicking this legacy further in the context of evidence drawn from the twentieth century would be of use for better preparing the region for the potential of increased hazard impacts in the future.

One could argue, as Hilary Beckles does, that British colonialism in the Caribbean held back or to some degree prevented industrialisation.⁷⁸⁰ The third chapter of this thesis demonstrated that the configuration of Caribbean society enforced by British colonialism prevented the development of large-scale disaster response techniques. The fourth and fifth

⁷⁷⁹ Bertrand Taithe, 'Humanitarianism and Colonialism: Religious Responses to the Algerian Drought and Famine of 1866-1870', in *Natural Disasters, Cultural Responses: Case Studies toward a Global Environmental History*, pp. 137–64.

⁷⁸⁰ Address delivered by Professor Sir Hilary Beckles, Chairman of the CARICOM reparations commission, House of Commons, Parliament of Great Britain, 14/07/2014, < <https://caricom.org/media-center/communications/speeches/address-delivered-by-professor-sir-hilary-beckles-chairman-of-the-caricom-r>>, [14/05/2018].

chapters demonstrated that British responses to disaster were largely ad-hoc and only naturally assumed a pattern of familiarity out of necessity, not out of a desire to design an efficient plan of response. In this respect this thesis goes some way to further expand on this idea that British colonialism held back development in the region. It could be argued and has been by many scholars that British colonialism had similar impacts around the world. Crucially however, this thesis shines a light on the specifics of that British legacy in the Caribbean. British colonialism was locked in a certain mode of production that had massive implications for the regions vulnerability to hazards and its overall development.

At a conference in 2017, Leon Seally-Huggins suggested that the discussions around reparations for slavery should be linked to climate change on the basis that British industrialisation – a process that set off centuries of carbon emissions – was in part built on the back of Caribbean colonisation.⁷⁸¹ This thesis cannot lay claim to providing a definitive, microscopic account of hazard vulnerability on every British-controlled island in this period. However, it shows that the organisation of British Caribbean society certainly negatively impacted the region's vulnerability to hazards and held back the development of broad societal coping mechanisms. In this respect, this thesis shows another angle from which we can view the linkage between reparations and climate change identified by Seally-Huggins. The Caribbean region faces an uncertain future as global climate change threatens at the very least to further increase the intensity of climatic hazards. Factors such as widespread deforestation first set in motion by the British have their role in creating the foundations of the region's current vulnerability.

This thesis has also shown how easily certain systems of unsustainable profit generation can effectively get locked in because they benefit groups who are not affected by

⁷⁸¹ Cauline Brathwaite, 'Why we should add Climate Change to the claim for Reparations to the Caribbean', *Cutlass: Bulletin of Caribbean Labour Solidarity*, 2:9 (2017), p. 6.

the damage they can cause. In the present day, the Caribbean islands previously colonised by the British derive the majority of their revenues from tourism.⁷⁸² This tourism has regularly been built by global capital, removed from the effects it has on the region's natural environments. Furthermore, a desire to meet huge debt obligations through the continued expansion of the tourist industry is pushing climate policy down the list of priorities in the region.⁷⁸³ Research such as this should encourage those making the decisions to cut down marshland (so essential to flood prevention) to create new luxury marinas for example to question what the acceptable limits to development are.⁷⁸⁴ That the plantation system with its inherent vulnerabilities managed to survive the nineteenth century, in greater part because it was the dominant recipient of relief, speaks to a greater need for an understanding of how relief is targeted. As private interests and NGOs have increasingly dominated the sphere of disaster relief we should, reflecting on a history of how it can be co-opted, move to question whether relief is targeted in a manner that truly benefits those in need. Relief should not be an exercise in which the social and organisational practices that exacerbate the impacts of natural hazards are simply reconstructed as they were. If disaster is to provide any opportunity it should be one to reconstruct in a manner that enhances hazard resilience. Relief should be accompanied by a careful consideration of the processes that led to its need. Relief should transition from being a brief moment of charity to an extended process that more effectively attempts to obviate the need for future relief. As this thesis demonstrates, how a society is organised and relates to its environment crucially shapes how that society chooses to respond to disaster.

⁷⁸² Matthew Louis Bishop, Anthony Payne, 'Climate Change and the Future of Caribbean Development', *The Journal of Development Studies*, 48.10 (2012), pp. 1536–53.

⁷⁸³ *Ibid.*, p. 1549.

⁷⁸⁴ Professor Robin Mahon, '“These Fields and Hills beyond recall”: Barbados and Environmental Sustainability', 11/10/2016, Youtube, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Y_KPo2jhtTY>, [22/05/2018].

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