
'ALL SLAVES ARE ENEMIES'

"You know," observed Robert, "it appears to me that you are as much afraid of these people as they are of you."

"Of course we are," said Rider; "it has been a case of fear on both sides. Fear is in the very texture of the mind of all the white people here; fear and boredom and sometimes disgust. That is why so many of us drink."

Henry de Lisser, *The White Witch of Rosehall*

The concern about the steady diminishing of the white population, and therefore the weakening of the militia, was not just about external threats to Barbados. As early as 1666, Governor Willoughby wrote to London that after the recent departures of whites to other islands and to Carolina, it was essential that they be replaced, or 'wee shall be soe thinned of Christian people . . . I feare our negroes will growe too hard for us'.

Because of the 'want of white people', a later report stated, Barbados faced dangers 'from without [but] much greater from within'. Whites were urgently needed not really for their labour (carried out more efficiently by the slaves), but for policing the enslaved Africans, whose number on the island was increasing at a furious rate.* This situation, of their own creation, was frankly terrifying for the white 'masters'; their island was becoming Africanised. The precariousness of the situation and the constant threat that this posed to their survival brought on amongst the planters a sense of continual crisis.

Perhaps the greatest fear of all was that the black slaves would unite with the poor, downtrodden whites and indentured servants to turn the

* Blacks were in the majority by 1660, and outnumbered the whites by two to one by the 1680s. By the end of the century, by which time a million had been shipped to the English sugar islands, there were, according to most estimates, 50,000 enslaved Africans and fewer than 16,000 whites in Barbados: more than three slaves for every white person.

whole system upside down. Indeed, the planter elite was torn between their contempt for the 'other' whites, who, increasingly, were transported felons rather than the hapless poor, and their need for them to control the slaves. In 1661, just as the balance of numbers tipped towards the blacks, the government in Barbados passed laws to govern treatment of indentured servants and slaves (both profoundly different from labour systems familiar in England). These codified what had already been established, while shaping the future for both categories.

The aim was to persuade the poor whites to ally themselves with the planter class, in effect to choose race over class as their defining characteristic. In the 'Act for the Better Ordering and Governing of Negroes',* the Africans were described as a 'heathenish, brutish and an uncertaine, dangerous kinde of people'. The white servants, though still heavily policed in their behaviour, were carefully given better rights than the blacks – to food, clothing, general treatment and legal protection. Slaves who assaulted a white person of whatever status were to be whipped, then, on a second offence whipped some more and have their nose slit and forehead branded. While on paper the Act aimed to protect the slaves from 'the Arbitrary, cruell and outrageous will of every evill disposed person', masters could punish slaves in any way they liked, even to death, the only penalty being a fine, and this was easily evaded. Whites' rights to trial by jury (a fundamental right of English law) were confirmed, while blacks faced a kangaroo court of the master's local cronies. For whites, differences between men and women were legally recognised, but not for blacks. Black men were to be severely punished if they had sex with a white woman, even if it was consensual, although white men could rape black women with impunity.

This racism was a new departure, as planters, who had recently lumped together African slaves and 'dissolute English, Scotch and [particularly] Irish', came to realise the usefulness to their security of 'whiteness'. A pamphleteer writing at the time felt it necessary to explain to his readers in England that 'white' was 'the general name for Europeans'. And just as the 1661 Acts were copied throughout the English West Indies and in South Carolina,† so this new ideology of whiteness was spread from Barbados and carried around the empire.

* Only once in the Act was the word 'slave' used rather than 'Negro', which indicates both the squeamishness that the English had over the term 'slave' and also how increasingly status and race were being collapsed.

† Emigrants to South Carolina were not just poor whites, many of whom still held on in Barbados. A number were younger sons of the island's big planter families, such as the Sandifords and Halls. With no more room to expand there, lesser offspring were sent off with whatever members of the household could be spared. From the Caribbean they brought with them slaves, the plantation system

In the 1640s, the Africans, whose did not simply a He put this down 'manning' by the some given privi – due to the man other and therefo

As the balance the poor whites practical, to buy and previously co 'the safety of the p But this was only 1660s wrote that though they are bon Enemies one to ano and assist one ano in the 1660s that thousands of slaves

Henry Drax, in his out certain of the Dr 'who had bene ane place he is of head or fish or flesh a week Suit Every year and differently from the

Most planters aimed feeding, to keep their ness. This, in fact, to survived the brutal 'M Caribbean, during wha

and 'mentality', a slave code, a sive role in shaping the new islands than to the rest of North four blacks to every white, sm showy society' of the eighteenth and between 1669 and 1737. Indies or were sons of islanders

In the 1640s, Richard Ligon had been amazed that Barbados's enslaved Africans, whose number at that time, interestingly, he wildly overestimated, did not simply use their superior numbers to seize control of the island. He put this down to the Africans' fear of firearms, their successful 'de-manning' by the institution of slavery, the 'divide-and-rule' tactic that saw some given privileges (such as wives) in return for loyalty, and their inability – due to the many different languages they spoke – to combine with each other and therefore organise themselves as a united body.

As the balance of numbers shifted inexorably against them, even with the poor whites largely on their side, the planters tried, as much as was practical, to buy slaves for their plantations in small groups from different and previously competing tribes or nations. One commentator wrote that 'the safety of the plantations depends upon having Negroes from all parts'. But this was only going to succeed for a short time. A visitor from the late 1660s wrote that the slaves were 'passionate Lovers one of another; and though they are born in different Countries, and sometimes, when at home, Enemies one to another; yet when occasion requires they mutually support and assist one another, as if they were all Brethren'. Scott himself warned in the 1660s that 'the whole may be endangered, for now there are many thousands of slaves that speak English'.

Henry Drax, in his influential 'Instructions', was very careful to single out certain of the Drax Hall slaves for special treatment. Moncky Nocco, 'who had bene ane Exelentt Slawe and will I hope Continue Soe in the place he is of head owerseer', was to be given extra food – '10 pounds of fish or flesh a week to dispose of to his family' as well as 'a new Sarge Suit Every year and A Hatt'. A handful of others were also to be treated differently from the bulk of the workforce.

Most planters aimed, by insisting on continuous overwork and under-feeding, to keep their slaves in a state of exhaustion and physical weakness. This, in fact, took little extra effort. Enslaved Africans who had survived the brutal 'Middle Passage', the journey from West Africa to the Caribbean, during which as many as a quarter died from dehydration or

and 'mentality', a slave code, speech patterns and architectural styles. In all, Barbadians had a decisive role in shaping the new colony, creating a slave-based plantation society more similar to the islands than to the rest of North America. Lowland Carolina would soon have a population ratio of four blacks to every white, similar to the ratio in Barbados. Parts of Charleston's 'brittle, gay and showy society' of the eighteenth century would echo the Barbados atmosphere of a century before, and between 1669 and 1737, nearly half of the governors of South Carolina had lived in the West Indies or were sons of islanders. Seven of the early Carolina governors had Barbados backgrounds.