Freedoms Won

Caribbean emancipations, ethnicities and nationhood

Hilary McD Beckles
Verene A Shepherd
Dedication

This book is dedicated to

Norma Joy Lazarus (d. 1982)

and to

the people of the former British-colonised Caribbean on the occasion of the bicentenary of the final abolition of the trans-Atlantic trade in Africans (1807–2007)
Contents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Introduction</th>
<th>vii</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Acknowledgements</td>
<td>ix</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1 **The limits of emancipation: freedom contained in Haiti: 1804 – 1844 | 1**
   1 | Freedom and bondage in revolutionary Haiti | 2

2 **Freedom without liberty: 1833 – 1886 | 7**
   1 | Apprenticeship in the British-colonised Caribbean | 8
   2 | Apprenticeship comes to an end | 14
   3 | 'Free Birth' in the Danish-colonised Caribbean | 16
   4 | Apprenticeship in the Dutch-colonised Caribbean | 18
   5 | Contratación in Puerto Rico | 18
   6 | Patronato in Cuba | 18

3 **New rights – old wrongs: 1804 – 1890 | 21**
   1 | Worker migration to new communities | 22
   2 | The labour concerns of the landholding class | 25
   3 | Labour scarcity: the Spanish-, French-, and Dutch-colonised territories | 25
   4 | Landholders’ solutions and alternatives | 28

4 **The African-Caribbean peasantry | 32**
   1 | Trends towards peasantry before and after the abolition of slavery | 33
   2 | Profile of the Caribbean peasantry | 34
   3 | Ways in which the peasantry became established | 34
   4 | Obstacles to the development of the peasantry | 35

5 **Peasants and production | 38**
   1 | The extent of peasant development in Haiti | 39
   2 | The extent of peasant development in Santo Domingo | 40

3 | The extent of peasant development in the French-colonised Caribbean | 40
4 | The extent of peasant development in the Dutch-colonised Caribbean | 40
5 | The extent of peasant development in the British-colonised Caribbean | 41
6 | The importance of the peasantry to the Caribbean | 46

6 **Immigrant labourers: new terms of bondage | 48**
   1 | Complaints of labour shortages | 49
   2 | Two phases of labour immigration | 49
   3 | Opposition and support for immigration | 49
   4 | The aims of immigration | 50
   5 | Inter-territorial migration | 50
   6 | Various schemes of immigration to the Caribbean | 52

7 **Indian arrival | 57**
   1 | The early labour experiments with Indian immigrants | 58
   2 | The reasons Indians left India | 58
   3 | Methods of recruitment | 59
   4 | The gender differences in Indian immigration | 60
   5 | Castes and religions of Indian immigrants | 61
   6 | Post-recruitment | 62
   7 | The passage to the Caribbean | 62
   8 | Immigration laws in the Caribbean | 64
   9 | Immigration and indentureship | 65
10 | Employers disobey the terms of the law | 67
11 | Indian resistance | 68
12 | The end of Indian immigration and indentureship | 69
13 | Post-indentureship | 71
14 | Emigration to third countries | 71

8 **Chinese, Javanese and other arrivals | 73**
   1 | Destinations and numbers of Chinese imported | 74
   2 | Chinese women and emigration | 75
   3 | The Chinese as contract labourers | 75
   4 | The end of Chinese immigration | 76
15 Caribbean civilisation 1: social life and culture: 1888 – 1962

1 | Class, ethnicity, hierarchy and lifestyle | 194
2 | Inter-ethnic and gender relations | 195
3 | Religions and different religious beliefs and customs | 198
4 | Festivals, celebrations and observances | 202
5 | Birth, death, and work traditions and practices | 208

16 Caribbean civilisation 2: work, leisure and artistic culture | 211

1 | The occupation of different classes | 212
2 | Family life and gender relations | 215
3 | Sports and recreational life | 216
4 | Transportation and communication | 222
5 | Artistic life | 224

17 Nationalism, decolonisation, independence | 243

1 | Reasons for disaffection | 244
2 | The changing of the Crown Colony system after the Morant Bay Rebellion | 246
3 | Movements towards independence | 250
4 | Persistent imperialism and dependency in the Commonwealth Caribbean | 257
5 | Implications of political independence | 259

18 Political leaders, national freedom and regional integration | 262

1 | Individuals and movements in Trinidad and Tobago | 263
2 | Individuals and movements in Barbados | 264
3 | Individuals and movements in Jamaica | 264
4 | Individuals and movements in colonial Guyana | 265
5 | George Price and Independence in Belize | 266
6 | The role of women in political movements in the post-slavery period | 266
7 | Nationalism and colonialism in the French territories | 268
8 | Nationalism and decolonisation in the Spanish Caribbean | 271
9 | Some 19th Century Spanish Caribbean freedom fighters | 274
10 | Political conditions in the Dutch colonies | 275

References and sources for further research | 278

Glossary | 289

Index | 292
Introduction

Emancipate yourselves from mental slavery; none but ourselves can free our minds …
Bob Marley

This present text aims at setting out the essential details of the social, economic and political experiences of Caribbean people as they emerged out of their enslavement, indentureship and other forms of unfreedom, and sought to actualise their liberty and create their own societies in the period 1838 – ca. 1985. A focus on post-slavery societies is crucial to any study of Caribbean civilisation as one cannot simply leave the scene of action at the moment of legal freedom, but should focus on long-range reflections.

As Liberties Lost showed, from the moment of capture and enslavement, Africans in the Caribbean, as elsewhere, signalled their intention to resist the plantation system. Resistance forced structural changes in the internal relations of Caribbean societies. While antislavery forces were not all internal, acts of self-liberation, most notably those in French St Domingue (now Haiti) where a revolt of the enslaved in 1791 brought down slavery, illustrate that the enslaved there were first to implement sustainable emancipation schemes within the hemisphere. Between the Haitian revolution and the last quarter of the 19th Century, the system of enslaving Africans in the Caribbean ended in a drawn-out programme of legislative emancipation. Emancipation came about at various dates in the different Caribbean territories. In a sense, the enslaved peoples of the French-colonised Caribbean territories had achieved emancipation earlier than other enslaved peoples, those in Haiti having won their freedom by revolutionary means in 1794. For a short while after the Haitian revolution, slavery was also declared abolished in the other French-colonised Caribbean territories, but by 1802 it had been re-imposed by orders of Napoleon Bonaparte. The Haitian army led by Toussaint tried to free enslaved people in neighbouring Santo Domingo.

President Boyer succeeded in 1822, despite several efforts by European powers to delay this process. It was not until 1848 that enslaved peoples in the other French-colonised territories of Guadeloupe, Martinique and French Guiana, now referred to as Guyana, were freed. In 1834, by an Act of Parliament of 1833, 668,000 enslaved people were freed in the British-colonised Caribbean territories. But Emancipation Acts did not signal the end of systems of domination. With the exception of the French Caribbean, Antigua and Bermuda, forms of new slavery, whether euphemistically called Apprenticeship, Free Birth/Free Womb, régimen de contratación or patronato, were introduced to the Caribbean as a means of replacing old forms of slavery. Intended to last from 1834 to 1840, the Apprenticeship System in the British-colonised Caribbean collapsed in 1838 in the face of the anti-slavery activities of humanitarians and apprentices, and the inefficient systems of implementation. After 1838 all formerly enslaved adults were freed.

The ending of the Apprenticeship System in the British-colonised territories, as indeed the ending of the other transitional systems, terminated the brutal slavery regime that had characterised the history of the region for over four centuries. The analysis of the Apprenticeship System revealed that it simply continued the project of labour control which began in the 15th Century. It was no wonder that the apprentices, especially the women, whose continued brutalisation became an issue of anti-apprenticeship activism, fought to end the new slavery system.

A somewhat different sequence of events took place in the Cayman Islands, Antigua, Barbuda and Bermuda. Both Bermuda and Antigua rejected the Apprenticeship period, and implemented immediate emancipation in 1834. Antigua did not bypass Apprenticeship because of moral or humanitarian reasons but for economic reasons. The Antiguan planters believed that full freedom would be cheaper than a delayed emancipation and that as a full plantation colony, alternatives to non-estate labour were limited; and so they had little fear that the formerly enslaved people would not return to work on the estates.
Barbuda was the private property of the Codrington family, owner of estates in Antigua and Barbados at the time of emancipation. It had no colonial government to pass an Emancipation Act and the framers of the Abolition Act in Britain had not even mentioned the island by name. Technically, of course, Barbuda fell under the British Crown, and so it was expected that emancipation would apply to Barbuda also. The years after 1834 posed problems for the Codringtons, the formerly enslaved and the British Government. In the Cayman Islands (which came under the governorship of Jamaica), because the technicalities of registration of the enslaved laid down by the 1834 Abolition Act had not been followed, emancipation took place by proclamation on 3 May 1835, and in 1837, by order of the new Governor of Jamaica, the Marquis of Sligo, the formerly enslaved were discharged from the remaining terms of their apprenticeship. In the Bahamas, the Acts to implement emancipation and the Apprenticeship System were on the statute books well before 1 August 1834.

The abolition of slavery came later in the other Caribbean territories – Santo Domingo in 1844, the Danish-colonised territories in 1848, the Dutch-colonised territories in 1863, Puerto Rico in 1873 and Cuba in 1886. Within the Americas, the Portuguese-ruled territory of Brazil was the last to abolish slavery in 1888, so the Iberian powers had been the earliest to establish slavery in the region and the last to abolish.

Individual enslaved persons had, of course, obtained freedom through marronage and self- or gratuitous manumission even before the slave systems officially ended: but, for the majority of enslaved people in the Caribbean, freedom came by legislation in the 19th Century. The ending of the system of slavery was a major event in all of the Caribbean. All freed people had high hopes of emancipation and citizenship, and expected a changed life. Skilled wage workers in rural and urban areas wanted greater bargaining power and better working and living conditions. Those who wanted to live independently of the estates as farmers wanted land on which to grow crops for subsistence and sale. The ownership of land was also a route to political enfranchisement and was important. But various obstacles were placed in the way of the fulfilment of these far-ranging hopes. Thus the post-slavery period was conflict-ridden as former owners and those formerly enslaved each struggled to realise their own expectations of the new order. In the case of the former slaveholders, they were intent on preserving their wealth and social status and wanted the freed people to continue to provide the labour which would allow them to do this. The freed people were equally bent on making their own conditions of labour – even to make a life for themselves if necessary outside of the boundaries of their former work places. A class struggle naturally ensued, and one result was the frustration of the peasantry in many places.

Furthermore, the importation of unfree immigrant labourers, in places, frustrated the independent action of the newly freed who, particularly in the larger colonies, were intent on settling in free villages and working on their former masters’ and mistresses’ properties only part-time, if at all. Many people believed that some of the colonies did not need to import bonded immigrants as they experienced a declining sugar industry and even had to begin to grow crops other than sugar cane; and alternative crops which replaced sugar-cane did not need as many full-time labourers. In the end, though, despite the pros and cons of immigration, bonded immigrants contributed greatly to the social and economic development of the Caribbean; and the descendants of immigrants who settled in the region have played fundamental leadership roles in Caribbean society. Like enslaved Africans, the majority of bonded Indians had been relocated to the Caribbean against their will by British colonialism, but struggled to free themselves from the legacies of indentureship.

African and Indian women encountered gender-specific obstacles as they sought to actualise their freedom. The workforce became increasingly male after the abolition of slavery and black women’s lack of education confined them to low-paying jobs. In many cases the use of indentured labourers displaced them as agricultural labourers and smaller properties no longer demanded their labour. Indentured Indian and Chinese women themselves, despite their tremendous effort, experienced multiple forms of oppression under the system of indentured servitude. Women of all ethnic groups experienced the effects of patriarchy and male dominance. The gender order enabled men to occupy the public sphere of wage labour while women were to confine themselves to the home, the ‘private sphere’. Those who braved the odds and remained as labourers were given the less remunerative tasks.

Except in Haiti, the governments of the Caribbean territories were controlled by the traditional planter elements, most of whom did not play a liberating role in shaping the new society to fulfil the expectations of the newly freed. Their allies, European officials, believed that African and Indian people should provide cheap labour for the estates. The elite land-owning class and its imperial supporters joined in oppressing the freed and bonded people and made inadequate provisions for their health, housing and education. Education was a route to upward social mobility and non-plantation occupations; the elite class did not want any democratic obstacles in the way of
its economic interest. The right to vote continued to be restrictive in most post-slavery societies well into the 20th century, and so the mass of African and Asian people were denied an active role in government. The refusal of colonial governments and land-owners to implement policies to help the formerly enslaved people and newly bonded, combined with continuing economic crises and failing economies, caused protest and anti-imperial struggles in all territories. For example, less than 30 years after the implementation of the Abolition Act, the ‘Vox Populi’ protest erupted in St. Vincent (1862). Following close on the heels of that 1862 protest were the 1865 Morant Bay Rebellion in Jamaica, the 1872 ‘Bridgetown Riots’ and the 1876 ‘Confederation Riots’ in Barbados.

The early 20th Century was as conflict-ridden as the 1840s and 1850s. By the mid 20th Century, Caribbean people struggled to throw off the colonial yoke. In the British-colonised territories, they first tried to do this collectively throughout the creation in 1958 of an independent political Federation. This Federation collapsed in 1962, resulting in the movement to independence as separate countries. Jamaica and Trinidad and Tobago were the first to seek Independence, achieving this on August 6 and 31, 1962 respectively, Barbados, and colonial Guyana followed in 1966. Dominica, St Lucia, St Vincent, Montserrat, St Kitts-Nevis, Anguilla and the Cayman Islands continued for longer under imperial rule. By 1985, however, many more former British-colonised territories had thrown off the imperial yoke.

For the French-colonised Caribbean territories like Martinique and Guadeloupe, and a few British-colonised Caribbean territories like Bermuda, the Cayman Islands, Montserrat and Anguilla, Independence still has not become a reality; though forms of anti-imperial struggles continue. Martinique, Guadeloupe and Guyane are overseas departments of France. Up to 1985, independence had still not been achieved for the Dutch-colonised Caribbean territories with the exception of Suriname.

Political Independence may have been attained by some, but this did not bring economic independence. Reliance on external sources for loans and investment created the environment for increased United States and European power in the region, supported as they were by their own political agenda in the face of the Cold War. Haiti and the Hispanic Caribbean were particularly affected by United States military interventions.

As this text shows, despite these difficulties, the Caribbean people have been able to carve out a life for themselves. They have used their dynamic freedom culture to help them to bear their social and economic difficulties. Others have resorted to emigration as the route to economic betterment; and their remittances have done much for the development of the region.

Hilary McD Beckles and Verene A Shepherd

Acknowledgements

This book could not have been completed without the assistance of several people. First of all, we acknowledge the research assistance provided by the following graduates of the University of the West Indies: Jaset Anderson, Dalea Bean, Symone Betton, Eldon Birthwright, Cavell Francis, Shanette Geochagen, Karen Graham, Tannyia Guerra, Georgia Hamilton, Natalie McCarthy, Kerry-Ann Morris, Arthur Newland, Michele Salmon, Nicole Plummer, Coral Purvill, Ahmed Reid, Mitze Reid and Vernon White. We recognize the invaluable help of Dalea Bean, Cavell Francis, Shani Roper and Maxine McDonnough with the photo search, and thank the reviewers for their close reading of the manuscript and useful comments, which helped us to improve the final product. The students and teachers who participated in workshops and seminars, at which some of the themes in the text were debated, must also be thanked.

The hospitality and assistance of colleagues, friends and family in London must also be acknowledged. Specifically, Angella and Jason Lazarus, and Annette, Janice and Philip Brade went beyond the call of duty to offer accommodation and technical support to Verene during summers of research and writing of early drafts. We owe a huge debt of gratitude to the editors and production team of Cambridge University Press, Africa and the Caribbean, who exercised patience and understanding throughout the process of writing, re-writing, editing and proof-reading.

Finally, we are grateful to our families for their patience and support and thank the following for permission to use important lines from their songs and to reproduce photographs and illustrations from their works and holdings:

Maps by Ann Westoby: 6, 8, 17, 19, 26, 41, 60, 64, 74, 100, 150, 248, 259.
Songlines: for the songlines by Bob Marley that preface chapters 2, 4, 6, 8, 9, 12, 14, 17 and 18, we gratefully acknowledge permission from the Bob Marley Foundation; for the songlines by The Mighty Scraper, we thank Stephen Gay.
Every effort has been made to trace copyright holders. The publishers would be very pleased to hear from anyone whose rights have been unwittingly infringed.