

ABSTRACT

During the period 1815-1854, Tobago's sugar-based economy like those of the other older British colonies faced serious problems. Sugar, rum and molasses faced competition from newer and non-British colonies on the British market. By 1822, the whole cash crop economy in Tobago was failing.

Before emancipation, the slaves were constrained not only by the slave laws which kept them under control, but also by missionaries (Moravians and Methodists) whose doctrine of obedience to authority contributed to the maintenance and stability of the Tobago slave society.

In general, the apprenticeship period in Tobago passed quietly without incidents between employers and labourers.

After the end of apprenticeship, many freed people refused to live and work on the estates. Rather they bought land and set up small villages selling produce, fishing, burning charcoal and occasionally working on the plantation. This was also the case especially in the larger and newer British West Indian islands.

The loss of labour due to emancipation, the coming of free trade in sugar, and a severe hurricane in Tobago in 1847 further damaged the planters prospects. Petitions

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to the British Government produced no results.

The metayage system provided some relief to the planters. It made available some ready cash for the labourer and a means by which the planter could obtain labour without paying cash wages after 1846.

The Tobago planters often mounted united opposition to Britain's fiscal, economic and commercial policies which they regarded as the principal cause of their distress. In the 1830s and 1840s, the Tobago Assembly, like other island assemblies, repeatedly adjourned its meetings, refusing to carry out public business, especially the passing of bills of supply.

To control the situation, the British Government introduced minor constitutional changes, culminating in the withdrawal of the Assembly's sole power over finances in 1854.