

ABSTRACT

British Imperial Trusteeship: the Dynamics of Reconstruction of British West Indian Society, with special reference to Trinidad, 1783 - 1838.

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This study examines the influence of ideas and policies for solving the problems of insecurity, political instability, and inefficiency of slave labour on the internal structure of the West Indian plantation colonies in the period 1783 to 1838. The search for solutions resulted in metropolitan reformers calling into being an ideology of trusteeship which embraced colonists' concern for amelioration of slavery, but included the rule of law which was strongly resisted by the latter.

The thesis rejects the historiographical emphasis laid on metropolitan reformers' concern for improving the spiritual and material conditions of slaves as the principal objective of their amelioration. Instead, the position taken is that the morality implicit in trusteeship was unquestionably self-serving. The study

asserts that behind the theological and philosophical rhetoric of the "Saints", there was a consciousness of themselves as harbingers and ideologues of a new age of colonialism in which their West Indian colonies no longer dominated the European sugar market and in which it was imperative to address the insecurity inherent in an exclusively African, servile labour-system. The thesis posits that in the ameliorative measures adopted for slaves, the focus was consistently on the defence of property and the enhancement of the value and productivity of colonial labour. The same was true for reformers' interest in the emancipation of slaves.

The Imperial Government's tinkering with slavery in order to appease both metropolitan reformers and West Indian plantership, inadvertently created the conditions which greatly destabilised the slave system. Slaves rejected openly the paternalistic terror-regime of the plantocracy within the framework of a newly-awakened class consciousness. This produced a crisis of insecurity to which the only feasible long-term solution was emancipation.