

ABSTRACT

1865 was a year in which many forces which had been travelling on collision courses climaxed in what has come to be called The Morant Bay Rebellion. For emancipation solved some problems, but gave rise to or emphasised many others, not least of which were the unsettled apartheid of the white ruling classes, the socio-political aspirations of the rather well-educated middle classes, and the adjustments attempted by the Asians and the Jews. But it was the blacks, whose struggle against the vicissitudes of everyday life in an island-territory where economic shortages blunted the basic efforts to exist by self-reliant methods and indeed the very will to survive, in whom some hope rested, nevertheless.

From the Governor down, there was, by the 1860s a crisis of leadership. This showed itself up in such facets as a land/ownership policy that was hostile to poor folk, and an official system of justice which was so iniquitous as to give rise to "People's Courts" being worked out by the citizens among themselves, so that there might be some semblance of balance, retribution, and fair compensation. With escalations in peasant taxation, land trespass suits, unemployment, mendicity, vagrancy, prostitution, nakedness, vagabondage, praedial larceny, confidence trickery, and moral depravity, these were far from being halcyon days.

Religion was for many an escape from the realities, although the orthodox denominations offered little attraction for those who felt polarised by the system. The largely nocturnal revivalist activity which the rural blacks supported as a partial answer to the irrelevancy of imported non-creolised, traditional theologies and liturgies was understood by the establishment as a dark, African, uncivilised threat to the status quo, to intelligence and to civil discipline.

Education, too, was so stymied that only a chosen few reached the secondary schools, whose curricula affected metropolitan criteria. The development of the school system was retarded by poor financing, inept methodologies, Christian (?) over-exuberance and an absence of worthwhile employment for those blacks who were in the successful minority of secondary school graduates.

Some changes had to come. The Jamaican history of society and ideas analyses 1865 as that time, and this thesis proposes unfinished creolisation and adaptation as focal in making inevitable (?) the violence in eastern Jamaica.