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ABSTRACT

THE INTER-WAR YEARS IN JAMAICA, 1919-1938  
AN ANALYSIS OF POVERTY AND MASS MISERY

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In May and June, 1938, there were widespread disturbances in Jamaica, as the lower class demonstrated against hunger, unemployment, low wages and general deprivation. This thesis looks at the period 1919-1938, the inter-war years, the last year in which the disturbances occurred. It examines the dynamics of a colonial society, a society with a rapidly growing population, the majority of whom lived in abject poverty and misery. It is this sector of the population with which the thesis concerns itself - the peasantry, the labourers and the unemployed. The well-to-do middle class and the relatively wealthy upper class are dealt with incidentally, as they are deemed necessary to the analysis.

The study reveals that the Jamaican lower class of 1919-1920 stood much in the same position as their poor ancestors of three generations previously. The forces which gave rise to miserable and deteriorating living conditions had survived slavery and the post-emancipation era. There had been changes in the society, but these were so superficial that the masses of people were still caught in the thralls of poverty.

Chapter I looks at the economic conditions of the ex-slaves in the post-emancipation era. It also reviews some of the important literature on the inter-war years. These are literary works which are often referred to in the thesis. The next four

chapters examine the social and political conditions which made the inter-war years a period of misery for lower class Jamaicans. The final chapter looks at their reaction to their plight as demonstrated in the 1938 disturbances.