

The Caribbean reaction to the Registry Bill (1815)

Introduction:

Member of Parliament James Stephen persuaded Parliament to pass a bill for the registration of all slaves in the British West Indies. The bill stated that ALL slaves in the British West Indies had to be registered by a certain date. Any slave that was not registered would be declared free. The registration list, if properly kept, would show any increase in slaves on the plantations. If the increase was not due to the birth of slaves it would have to be explained. This would help to identify slaves that were being shipped illegally into the colonies.

Throughout the British West Indies the planters reacted negatively to the bill. Some refused to enact it in their colony. They were furious! They claimed that England was interfering in their private business. This would certainly bring them to ruin, they argued.

In Barbados, the planters went wild. They began to argue that soon the emancipation bill would come. They did this to stir all planters into action. The plan backfired. The slaves heard them and thought that the emancipation bill had indeed come from England and that the planters were not only furious about it but they were not going to give the slaves their freedom. The news spread like wildfire among the slaves. They decided to do as their brethren in Haiti did in 1791 and claim their freedom by means of a rebellion. (The Barbados Rebellion 1816). Again the planters blamed the Non-Conformist missionaries. They caught the Methodist minister tarred him and tried to burn him alive! They also began destroying his chapel.