

The Peasantry

Introduction:

The conditions or factors that gave birth to the Peasantry are similar to those for the Free Villages.

To begin with each of these villages was a socio-economic unit that is the land was used for both housing and farming. Each person was sure to have even a garden plot. That was their traditional way of providing food and extras for themselves from the days of slavery.

When we speak of the peasants, we are speaking about that group of people who owned (small) plots of land from which they earned a livelihood.

Conditions/Factors

- (a) Much of the land was bought through the Free Village movement
- (b) The freed people had the skill of producing and marketing ground provisions and other crops for sale.
- (c) There was an even larger market than during slavery. Now that the entire population was free it was a certainty that the demand for foodstuffs and articles would increase.
- (d) It was seen as a way to earn additional income
- (e) It was a sure way to feed the many mouths of a large family.
- (f) The more peasants became successful and independent the more the movement spread.

The planters reacted just as negatively to the Peasantry as they did to the Free Village movement. The acquisition of land by the blacks threatened their 'exclusive' ownership of land. They were worried that the blacks would become eligible for voting rights and that worse yet they may want to feel themselves equal with them. The ruling class jealously guarded their class. They placed a number of obstacles in the way of the emerging peasantry.