

The Revolt in Barbados (1816)

Why did this revolt occur?

The activities of Non-Conformist missionaries or free coloureds such as Washington Franklin, Cain Davis, JR. Sergeant; slaves such as Bussa, Roach, Jackey, Ranger, Mingo contributed to the formation of the revolt.



Bussa

These people preached ideas of freedom, equality and brotherhood but also urged the slaves to refrain from violence and to wait for freedom to come from England. The work and encouragement from missionaries like Wesleyan Methodists, Baptists, and London Missionary Society along with the people mentioned above also served as a form of motivation.

A Registry Bill was suggested for all British colonies by abolitionist James Stephen in 1812. This required all slaves to be registered. This would help to identify slaves being illegally shipped into the colonies. Their births, deaths, accidents, runaways and recaptures would be recorded each year. It would therefore be illegal to have an unregistered slave and as a result the planter/owner would be punished by a fine or other means. In 1815, the British Government asked all Colonial Assemblies to pass a Registration Act. The whites thought of this as an unnecessary interference and would not agree to even vote on the bill.

Slaves learnt about the registered schemes through pamphlets from the Anti-slavery society arriving in the Caribbean as well as local newspapers carrying reports of antislavery meetings and debates in Parliament. Those who could, read local as well as English papers such as Bridgetown Gazette and Barbados Mercury passed on information to those who could not.

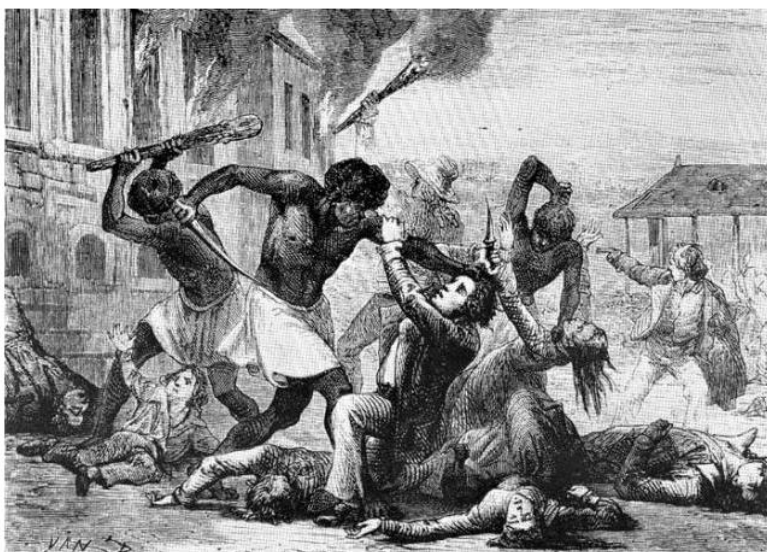
News was picked up in various places such as markets. Domestic slaves heard their masters grumbling about the new schemes for ending slavery. The slaves thought that the Registration Bill was notice from England for their freedom, which was talked of by the Non-conformist missionaries. They learnt of the rejection of the bill by the planters and believed that they were restricting the freedom, which the British government intended them to have.

The slaves were tired of being ill-treated and wanted freedom. Some thought of Barbados as a "Black man's land". They thought that only black people had a right to live there.

The Course of the Barbados Revolt (1816)

The aforementioned causes led to the careful planning and organization of this revolt that **was the first in Barbados in one hundred and** twenty four years. This rebellion therefore represented an attempt by the slaves to influence the structure and conditions of the society in which they lived. As a result the actual planning begun after the House of Assembly refused to conform to the Imperial Bill in 1815. Certain slaves such as: Bussa, Roach, Jackey, Range and Mingo who lived on various estates in Barbados led this rebellion. But there was an important group of committed rebels throughout the southern and central parishes.

The slaves chose April 14, which was a Friday, because it was a holiday during Easter. Many slaves who were involved in the planning with Bussa on the Bayleys Estate began destroying property belonging to the planter and burning canefields but the first major battle between the militia and the rebels took place on Lowthers plantation at noon on Easter Monday. The determined rebels armed with muskets and pitchforks fought bravely against the militia.



Slave uprising

News of the revolt spread through parishes such as Christchurch, St. Thomas; St John, St. George, St Michael, therefore encouraging other slaves to join in the fight. Approximately sixty estate buildings and canefields were demolished at the hands of local slaves with the aid of fire. More than half of the island was engulfed by the insurrection. It is reasonable to argue that the revolt lasted for four days since both the fire and the fight had ceased by Wednesday.



Burning Canefields

Unfortunately the revolt was crushed by troops of militia and regulars led by Colonel Edward Codd. These men showed no mercy, even though the slaves showed no violence towards them, they rounded up the protestors and quickly ended the chaos by punishing all those involved.

The Results of the Barbados Revolt 1816

1. Unfortunately, one hundred and seventy six (176) slaves died during the rebellion, including its leader, Bussa. Two hundred and fourteen other slaves were executed afterwards including Franklin, another leader of the rebellion.

2. The whites turned against the Baptist Missionaries, who they blamed for inciting their members and threatened them to expel them from the island. They also proceeded to damage the London Missionary Society's chapel belonging to Shrewsbury.

In fear of his own life, the Baptist Missionary William Shrewsbury was forced to leave Barbados and take refuge in St. Vincent.

3. The slaves destroyed one fifth of the sugar crop during the rebellion along with sixty estate buildings. Damage estimated at some one and half million pounds. (?1 ?m)

4. Approximately one hundred slaves (100) were deported to British Honduras but local officials refused to allow them on shore so they were taken to Sierra Leone.

5. The revolt contributed to the abolition of slavery in 1834 by the British Parliament. It was used by the supporters of Abolition to strengthen their case. They highlighted the negative effects of slavery particularly on the whites. Humanitarians concentrated their arguments on the mortality rate of the rebellion. They feared an even worse 'bloodbath' if the slaves were not freed in the near future.

6. The colonial authorities increased security in the colony while planters increased security on the estates. A chain link of signal stations were erected along the Barbadian coastline. Martial law remained in force for the next eighty-nine days.

7. For their loyalty to the whites, the free coloureds were given an extension of their civil liberties in 1817, the year following the rebellion. For example, they were allowed to testify in courts against whites.