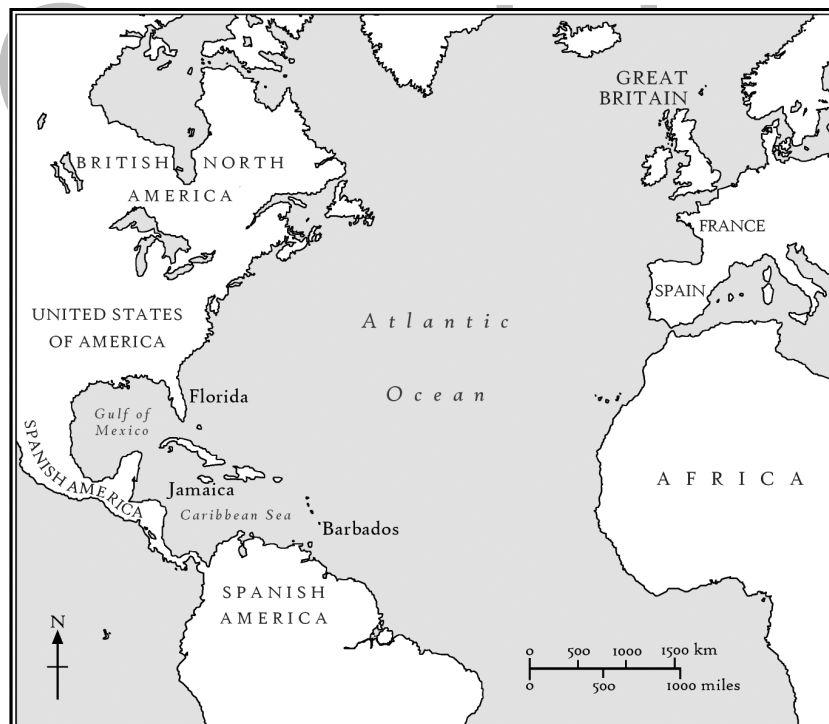


## INTRODUCTION

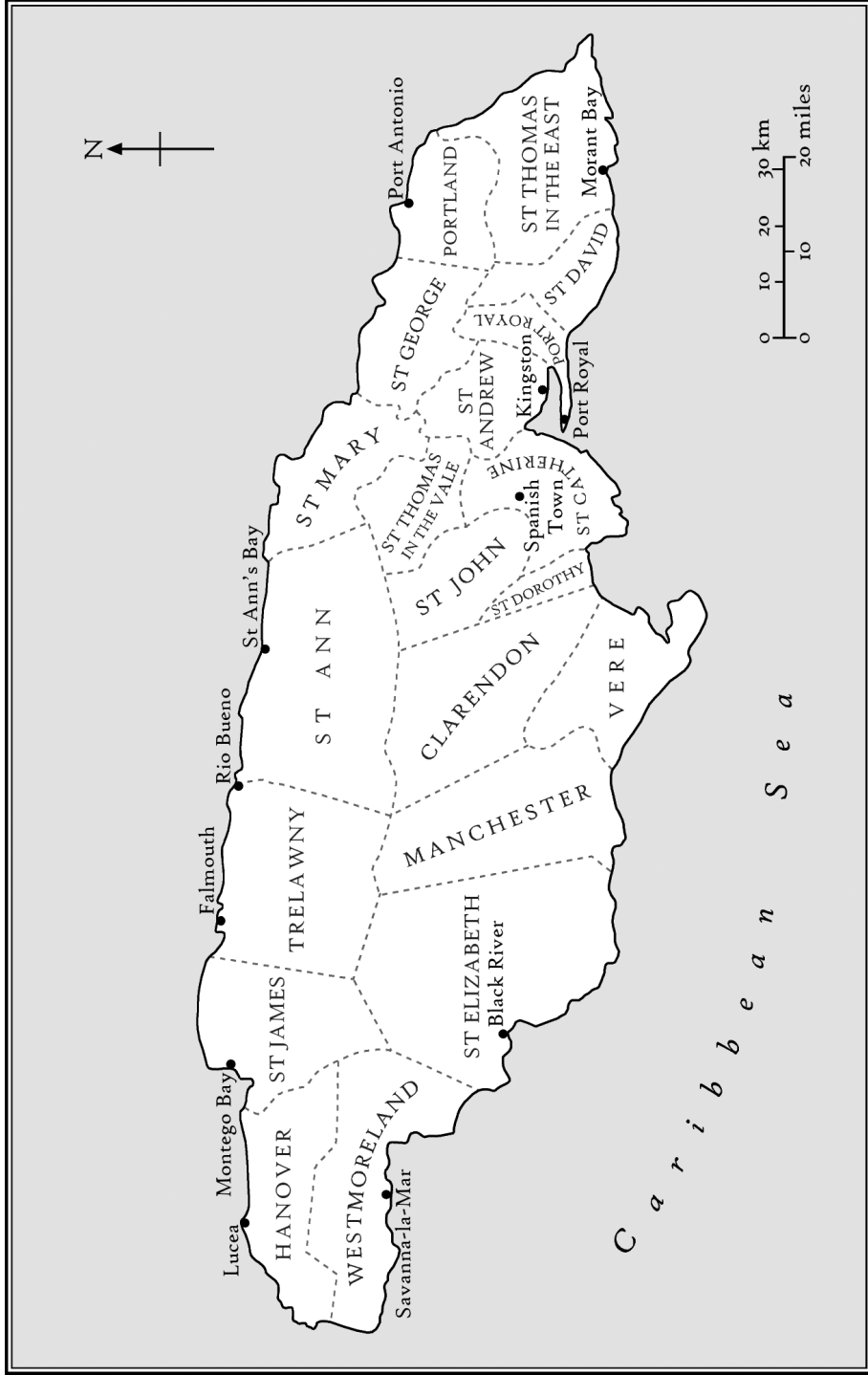
In 1792, a Jamaican plantation owner was faced with a question about the possible impact of an end to the slave trade. Simon Taylor, recently arrived in London, was providing evidence to a House of Lords enquiry. Asked what he thought the effect of abolition would be on poorer white colonists who supervised work on Jamaican slave-run sugar plantations, his immediate reply was, 'Sending them off the island'. He went on to elaborate that they came to Jamaica 'with an intent to better their circumstances; what little money they can save out of their salaries, or whatever little credit they can procure, they invest in Negroes'. Some employed their newly acquired human property as 'tradesmen'; others hired them out to the plantations as part of a 'jobbing gang'. Taylor said that those white men with more money 'endeavour to get settlements', raising crops for local consumption or coffee for export, but that 'if they were not able to have Negroes they certainly could not cultivate these settlements, and consequently would go to some country where they could be better off'.<sup>1</sup> This testimony exaggerated the consequences of ending the slave trade but accurately reflected one of the social facts that defined life in Jamaica. From the wealthiest of planters like Taylor to the lowly white staff on his properties, slaveholding was central to the lives of white settlers. Managing slaves was a means of employment, and for white men, owning slaves was a path to material betterment, to independence and to greater freedom.

By the end of the eighteenth century, the rise of the British abolitionist movement meant slaveholders like Taylor were pressured into defending the social and economic world that they perpetuated in the Caribbean. After 1787, a sustained political campaign called for the abolition of the British transatlantic slave trade, and after the end of the trade in 1807, abolitionists continued to lobby for the reform and gradual ending of slavery. In 1833, following a radicalization of metropolitan antislavery campaigning and a large-scale slave uprising in Jamaica, the imperial government finally passed legislation that would free slaves living in the British empire. This study concentrates on the cultural and social world of slaveholders in Jamaica from the beginning of the organized British antislavery campaigns of the 1780s until the achievement of full juridical emancipation during the 1830s, a period that can usefully be described as the 'era of abolition'.

The West Indies were the most important part of Britain's eighteenth-century empire. Slave-produced Caribbean sugar was at the centre of a booming transatlantic economy, and Jamaica, the largest of the British islands in the region, was a crucial nodal point in the networks of trade, slavery and empire that shaped the eighteenth-century Atlantic (Map 1). In 1774, the plantation owner Edward Long wrote, 'that, since our plantations first became thriving and profitable, the national opulence has every way augmented'. Unlike Taylor's testimony, these claims were not exaggerations. John McCusker notes that white settlers in British Caribbean colonies produced and consumed far more 'per capita than did their neighbours in the Thirteen Continental Colonies'. In the late eighteenth century, the West Indies accounted for about a fifth of all British imports. Around 7 per cent of the nation's exports went to the region, and the Caribbean trade also sustained important markets and industries in the metropole. Jamaica, as Trevor Burnard and Kenneth Morgan have shown, 'was a dominating presence' in the British West Indies. At the mid-point of the century, more than 40 per cent of the population of these colonies lived on the island. Jamaica also exported over 40 per cent of the sugar imported into the metropole, and more than a third of all slave vessels trading to British America docked there.<sup>2</sup>



Map 1. The Atlantic.



Map 2. Jamaica in the early nineteenth century.

During the era of abolition, things changed dramatically in Jamaica and in the world beyond the colony. In spite of British defeat in the American War of Independence, the fifty years that followed saw a dramatic revival of the nation's wealth and power. The size of the empire increased, representing about a quarter of the world's population by 1820. The British armed forces improved in strength and proved their effectiveness in successful wars with France. The national economy grew rapidly as well, and by the 1830s, Britain accounted for about a third of world trade. Slaveholders in Jamaica did not benefit from this period of transformation and expansion. They experienced a decline in political influence, and by the 1820s the sugar colonies had entered a period of pronounced economic decline, which meant, as McCusker puts it, that colonies that 'had been lively, viable contributors to an imperial economy in 1750 were dead in the water by 1850'. This did not mean an end to the white occupation of Jamaica, as Taylor had predicted. Nevertheless, viewed from the imperial metropole, Jamaica ceased to be the jewel in the crown of the empire and became a problematic colony associated with irreligion, sin and slavery. It gradually ceased to be a land of opportunity for white slaveholding men on the make, and the economic prosperity of the island ebbed away.<sup>3</sup>

How did slaveholders like Taylor and the hopeful white colonists he described respond to these transformations? And how did they seek to defend their interests and shape the future of the societies they presided over? This book explores these questions by considering the importance of slavery to white settlers and the impact that abolitionism had on their outlook. It looks at the extent and nature of slaveholding, asking how it shaped the fabric of white society, and it considers relations between slaveholders and other groups, examining how institutions, including law courts and the island militia, reflected and perpetuated the local social order. It also asks how slaveholders reacted to criticisms of slavery emanating from the metropole and to challenges closer to home such as protests on the part of enslaved people. In these ways, the book aims to improve our understanding of slavery in Jamaica and of the struggle for emancipation in the colony, placing these in the broader context of the history of the British Atlantic world and struggles for freedom across the empire.

It argues that important aspects of the defence of slavery were rooted in the social and cultural world that slaveholders created in Jamaica. Scholarship on the proslavery response to British abolitionism has shown how slaveholders defended their economic system with arguments about profit and the national interest, backed up by what Gordon Lewis describes as 'a series of rationalized prejudices and unexamined assumptions'.<sup>4</sup> There is certainly much to recommend this perspective. The self-serving bigotry of slaveholders is plain for us to see, but as scholars have begun to recognize, proslavery politics and culture during the era of abolition requires closer scrutiny.<sup>5</sup> To better understand the defence of slavery

and the broader struggle over the institution and its future, it is necessary to examine what made white colonists invest so heavily in the prejudices and assumptions that underpinned slaveholding society in the Caribbean. Their material interest in the system was bound up with an intricate set of social aspirations and cultural values, which are particularly evident in the proslavery protests of Jamaican slaveholders. They sought to hold on to the freedoms they enjoyed as white men while presenting themselves as loyal and valuable subjects of the British empire. As much as defending their economic concerns, therefore, slaveholders in Jamaica defended the independence, opportunities and prestige that slavery offered to them, and they were prepared to resort to violent extremes to try to perpetuate the colonial social world of white privilege that they had created.

Jamaica, which is about 140 miles long, east to west, and about fifty miles across at its widest point, was topographically diverse. The British divided the island into three counties: Surrey, in the east; Middlesex, covering the central parts of the island; and Cornwall in the west. By 1834, there were twenty parishes, which were much larger than their English equivalents (Map 2). Most of the interior was hilly and forested, and to the east, the Blue Mountains rose to over 2,000 metres. In the west, a densely wooded and pitted landscape known as the Cockpit Country covered interior parts of the parishes of St James, St Elizabeth and Trelawny. These inaccessible interior districts provided ideal places of refuge for small groups of Maroons, who had escaped slavery on the plantations and formed semiautonomous communities.<sup>6</sup>

The majority of the population of Jamaica lived on the coastal plains around the periphery of the island and along the fertile river valleys. Large sugar plantations, often referred to as 'estates', occupied the best land in these low-lying regions. Though they varied in size, each estate covered several hundreds of acres and the average was around 600 acres. By the nineteenth century, the average Jamaican estate had over 200 slaves, and about half of the enslaved population lived and worked on these properties. Sugar estates were interspersed with smaller settlements and livestock farms, and livestock rearing on properties known as 'pens' was particularly common on the high grassy plains in and around the parishes of St Ann and St Elizabeth. Coffee plantations, which accounted for about 15 per cent of the enslaved workforce, were also a recurrent feature in the landscape of some parishes, particularly in upland regions, where the crop grew best.<sup>7</sup>

This was a predominantly rural society. Most people, enslaved and free, lived and worked on plantations, pens or other rural settlements. There were some urban centres, notably Kingston, the main port; Spanish Town, the administrative capital; and Montego Bay, a port serving the recently developed plantation regions of the north and west. By the time slavery was abolished, about 25,000 enslaved people, 8 per cent of the enslaved population, lived and worked in towns, about half of them in Kingston. According to one late eighteenth-century esti-

mate, there were about 2,000 houses 'besides negro huts' in Kingston, 900 in Spanish Town and 600 in Montego Bay, and the size of the slave population of Kingston and Montego Bay indicates that these urban centres were larger still at the point of emancipation. Besides the principal towns, there were smaller settlements, mostly along the coast. Each parish had an administrative centre, and parish towns like Falmouth in Trelawny, Savanna-la-Mar in the parish of Westmoreland, and Morant Bay in the parish of St Thomas in the East, were focal points for local life, providing facilities such as a courthouse, market place, taverns and stores.<sup>8</sup>

During the era of abolition, the total population of Jamaica was at its highest in 1807 when there were about 390,000 people living on the island, although accurate estimates are difficult for the period before the first island-wide census. After 1817, registers of slaves made it possible to enumerate the enslaved population, but we lack comparable data for the free population. One commentator estimated that there were 35,000 white inhabitants in 1823, but as Barry Higman remarks, this figure seems too high when compared with the results of the first census of 1844 and other fragmentary data. Higman's estimate of 16,750 whites in 1832, however, seems too low, partly because it appears to underestimate the number of white staff working on sugar plantations. There were probably between 20,000 and 25,000 white people in Jamaica at the beginning of the nineteenth century, and their numbers are likely to have declined a little between the abolition of the slave trade and emancipation, by which time whites made up about 5 per cent of the total population. The majority of these white colonists were male, and many of them were slaveholders.<sup>9</sup>

The slave population of Jamaica rose rapidly during the eighteenth century. In 1673, there were about 9,500 enslaved people in Jamaica, making up 55 per cent of the total population. After that, the enslaved population grew along with the spread of sugar plantations across the island. There were about 420 sugar estates in Jamaica in 1739 and there were well over 1,000 at the end of the eighteenth century, by which time the average size of sugar plantations had grown dramatically. This economic expansion helped to create a high demand for enslaved workers, and the enslaved population stood at over 250,000 by the final decade of the eighteenth century and had reached about 354,000 in 1808. The expansion of sugar and slavery in eighteenth-century Jamaica was bought at huge human cost, and high mortality was a defining characteristic of life on slave-run properties. Because of this, slaveholders relied on the slave trade to sustain and expand their unfree work force, and the end of the trade in slaves created demographic imbalances that had caused the enslaved population to dip to 311,000 by 1834. In spite of this fall, enslaved people remained by far the largest demographic group in Jamaica and comprised some 84 per cent of the population at the time of emancipation.<sup>10</sup>

Besides white colonists and enslaved people there was a population of free black and mixed-race people in Jamaica, and this group grew considerably in size and importance during the era of abolition. These free people of colour had either been freed from slavery or born into freedom.<sup>11</sup> They came to outnumber white people in the colony at around the beginning of the nineteenth century, and the limited available demographic data suggest that their numbers grew to about 42,000 by 1834, which meant that they made up about 11 per cent of the total population. This social group first came into being because slaveholders occasionally freed individual slaves, a practice known as 'manumission'. Some subjects of manumission were loyal and trustworthy 'confidential' slaves, and some slaveholders also freed their enslaved mistresses and children. In Jamaica, sexual relations between white men and enslaved women were common, and since legal status passed from one generation to the next via the female line, the children of enslaved mothers were born into slavery, regardless of their father's status. There were therefore many mixed-race people on the plantations, most of whom remained enslaved. However, slaveholders were particularly inclined to manumit their children, and as a partial consequence of this, around two thirds of the free non-whites in Jamaican slave society were of mixed-race.<sup>12</sup>

The sexual opportunism of white men was an important vestige of their coercive power and high social status. In Jamaica, there were few legal or other constraints on what slaveholders could do to enslaved people. Outnumbered by those whose labour they sought to exploit, slaveholders and managers deployed a variety of terror tactics to maintain control on the plantations, using violent and public forms of punishment designed to remind victims and onlookers of white domination. On the plantations, whipping was commonly used to punish and coerce people, and slaveholders also employed methods of confinement that ranged from the use of stocks, known as 'bilboes', to plantation dungeons. During the era of abolition there was a partial move away from some of the more gruesome physical forms of physical punishment, such as dismemberment and disfiguring, towards disciplinary methods such as confinement, and slaveholders made increasing use of parish workhouses to confine and punish enslaved people. This does not necessarily mean, however, that slavery was being 'improved' or 'ameliorated' as slaveholders often claimed. Rather, enslaved people were experiencing the development of new forms of disciplinary technology, and arbitrary and violent corporal punishment remained an essential mainstay of the system regardless of these transformations.<sup>13</sup>

White male authority extended beyond plantations and other slave-run properties. Only white men enjoyed full civil rights and a stake in public life, which was especially significant because, although Jamaica was a colony, white male settlers had a large say in how the island was governed. The Governor represented the British Crown on the island, and he and his staff made up the executive branch of

government, responsible for the defence of the island and the dispensation of justice. The Governor's powers were limited by the legislative Assembly, which met annually in Spanish Town and was elected by local men with adequate landed property to qualify to vote. The Assembly was an influential body. It had the power to frame and pass laws and to legislate on matters of local taxation. Most of its members were wealthy planters and they repeatedly demonstrated a propensity to confront the imperial government in defence of their interests. Local government was administered via elected parish vestries, which were controlled by slaveholding colonists, and colonists, particularly those from the propertied elite, also had a large say in running the island's law courts and local militia.<sup>14</sup>

At the beginning of the era of abolition, Jamaican slaveholders were used to defending the supposed rights of their local institutions against imperial authorities and they were also familiar with metropolitan disdain for their way of life, but they were unprepared for a sustained British campaign for thoroughgoing reform. Many eighteenth-century observers worried about the effects of Caribbean living on the supposedly British colonists who remained in the slave colonies for long periods. Britons living in tropical slave societies like Jamaica faced what Michal Rozbicki describes as a 'curse of provincialism', whereby British cultural arbiters associated the colonists' distance from the metropole, rural lifestyles and distinctive institutions with cultural inferiority. Many maintained that white colonists had slipped from correct British standards of behaviour, and metropolitan critics were particularly uneasy about the peculiarly colonial institution of slavery.<sup>15</sup>

Before the 1780s, even though many criticized the institution, most people in Britain believed that slavery was a necessary part of empire, but as Christopher Brown has demonstrated, by the late 1780s, these criticisms of colonial life had developed into a national antislavery campaign that threatened the vital interests of slaveholders across the empire. Abolitionists combined humanitarian concerns for enslaved people with forceful condemnation of white colonial behaviour, and as David Lambert argues, 'white colonial identities' became a 'site of struggle' in the debates over slavery. For example, the churchman James Ramsay, who had witnessed the brutality of slave trading and plantation life at first hand, worried about the absence of religious and legal restraints on slaveholders in the Caribbean, remarking that they were left 'at liberty, as masters' to treat enslaved people 'with the same unfeeling wantonness, which without control they may exercise on their cattle'. Examples of legally sanctioned tyranny and moral disorder in the colonies remained mainstays of antislavery campaigning, and metropolitan reformers sought to mobilize them as damning demonstrations of the illegitimacy of the planters' right to rule over West Indian societies. Focusing squarely on slavery, the institution that defined local life, these campaigns struck at the

roots of colonists' wealth, power and identity, provoking angry reactions from slaveholders, who lambasted their metropolitan opponents.<sup>16</sup>

On their own, the arguments and campaigns of the so-called 'saints' of the abolition movement were a thorn in the slaveholders' side, but the abolitionist challenge took on a far greater order of magnitude because they coincided with the development of new ways of thinking about colonial governance. For much of the eighteenth century, the imperial government had tended to leave colonists alone to manage local affairs, providing them with relative autonomy from metropolitan control. During the era of abolition, however, the imperial government began to demonstrate a new tendency to use its powers to disallow laws passed by colonial legislatures like the Jamaican Assembly, particularly on matters concerning slavery, and the Colonial Office also began to investigate conspicuous cases of slave mistreatment in the colonies. These changes reflected a tendency towards centralization in imperial administration as well as the rising influence of abolitionism, and they ensured that disagreements over the constitutional rights of white Jamaican colonists became a central feature of the debates over slavery.<sup>17</sup>

Jamaican slaveholders also faced local challenges to their authority. Since the formation of the slave system, enslaved people had found ways to resist their oppressors, often by day-to-day acts like slow work, feigning illness, theft and sabotage, and they tried to overcome some of the worst hardships that slaveholders imposed on them by building a common culture in the time they spent while not working directly for the benefit of the slaveholders. Groups of enslaved people also rose in rebellion, although this was a particularly risky method of confronting white authority, as slaveholders repressed uprisings with extreme violence.<sup>18</sup>

Brutal reactions to physical challenges to their authority were testimony to the slaveholders' deeply held fears about slave revolts. Such anxiety was particularly acute in the Caribbean, where white colonists were comprehensively outnumbered by enslaved people. Uprisings were common in eighteenth-century Jamaica, and in 1760, the island's slaveholders narrowly defeated a large-scale slave rebellion known as Tacky's revolt, which was, as Trevor Burnard points out, 'a very dangerous near disaster' for the white colonists. Three decades later, white slaveholders in the neighbouring colony of French St Domingue faced a very real disaster, when enslaved people rose en-masse, eventually winning their freedom and seizing the colony from their former masters. This wholesale challenge to slavery ended in 1804 with the foundation of the independent republic of Haiti, and as David Brion Davis remarks, it 'stunned the world' and 'taunted the nerves of slaveholders from Maryland to Brazil'. In Jamaica, the destruction of St Domingue loomed large in the imaginations of slaveholders, who feared that their society might experience the same fate.<sup>19</sup>

While it filled slaveholders with dread, the establishment of Haiti was a beacon of hope to enslaved people: a demonstration that slavery could be defeated. Although the repressive power of the planters and the imperial state ensured that no major slave uprising occurred in Jamaica during the period of the Haitian Revolution, the Haitians had emphasized the possibilities for an end to slavery and white colonial domination.<sup>20</sup>

Coinciding and intersecting with the French Revolution, the overthrow of the slaveholders of St Domingue also highlighted the importance of connections between the Caribbean and Europe in creating new forms of slave resistance. These transatlantic connections were a defining element of local challenges to Jamaican slaveholders during the early nineteenth century. The rise of the British antislavery movement influenced resistance and opposition by enslaved people in Jamaica, as enslaved people used the knowledge that they had political sympathizers in the metropole to their advantage in their struggle for freedom. Free people of colour were also able to find British allies willing to aid them in their local campaigns for legal equality with whites. Furthermore, the work of white metropolitan missionaries affected political struggles between the slaveholders and other groups in Jamaica, as the Bible and church attendance began to shape the ideology and organization of protests against slavery and the exclusive privileges claimed by white men.<sup>21</sup>

Conflict was therefore a crucial characteristic of life in Jamaica during the era of abolition, and so too were social transience and demographic instability. Despite the abolition of the slave trade, high mortality and the possibility of sale continued to make life short and uncertain for enslaved people.<sup>22</sup> White migrants and settlers also found Jamaica to be a dangerous and unstable place and their 'social patterns continued to exhibit marked transitory and impermanent characteristics'. They died in large numbers from local fevers, men outnumbered women, and colonists frequently travelled from place to place within the island, often choosing to leave altogether if they were fortunate enough to survive and become wealthy.<sup>23</sup>

It is important to emphasize, however, that British migrants continued to travel to Jamaica during the era of abolition, and although the white population was not self-sustaining, many colonists lived permanently on the island, while others remained there for long stretches of time, and by the early nineteenth century white slaveholders were an important part of a distinctively local, or 'creole', society. Kamau Brathwaite has presented a theory of 'creolization' in relation to Jamaica during this period, emphasizing the process of social and cultural creation brought about by the meeting of Europeans and Africans in a New World environment. As Nigel Bolland states, this model 'acknowledges the existence of internal cleavages and conflicts in the slave society, but also stresses the process of interaction and mutual adjustment between the major cultural traditions of Europe and Africa.'<sup>24</sup>

Slaveholders in Jamaica were anxious about cultural creolization. They were, as Michael Craton puts it, 'reluctant creoles,' wedded to a distinctively Caribbean way of life but disinclined to draw attention to the true extent of their many divergences from British practices and cultural standards. During the era of abolition, as simple metropolitan disdain for the colonists gave way to strongly voiced arguments that Britishness and slaveholding were fundamentally incompatible, Jamaican planters faced a deepening of what Sarah Yeh has described as their 'identity crisis.' They forcefully staked claims that they should be seen and accepted as British subjects. At the same time they held tenaciously to the very practices and institutions that undermined these assertions in the eyes of hostile metropolitan critics. Despite their protestations, the slaveholders helped to create a creolized slave society in Jamaica, and their conflicts and interactions with enslaved people helped to ensure that they adopted distinctively local practices and attitudes.<sup>25</sup>

Although many colonists chose to reside in Jamaica, by the late eighteenth century, significant numbers of the wealthiest proprietors chose to retire from the island and live out their days in the healthier and safer environs of the metropole. By the time of emancipation, most of the owners of sugar estates on the island were living as permanent or temporary absentees in the metropole, making occasional visits to their plantations or managing them entirely by proxy. There was, nevertheless, still a white community on the island. Only a few of the wealthiest slaveholders could aspire to become absentee proprietors, and absentee planters left their properties in the care of local men who were known as 'attorneys.' Most slaveholders remained in the colony, and in each parish there was an established elite made up of the remaining resident sugar planters and the most significant of the plantation attorneys.<sup>26</sup>

Despite the lure of the metropole, slaveholding in Jamaica offered considerable material benefits to white male colonists, who also derived social advantages from being part of the only fully free group in a society of disenfranchised and dispossessed others. It is important to note, however, that many white women also owned slaves. Nevertheless, these slaveholding women did not have the economic opportunities that men enjoyed, and the male-dominated establishment excluded them from privileges such as voting, holding public office and sitting on juries. Furthermore, as David Lambert notes, debates over slavery during the era of abolition tended to concentrate on the 'figure of the white West Indian master.' As slaveholders and members of the ruling social group, women in Jamaica undoubtedly benefited from and helped to uphold slavery. However, male colonists were the most prominent, active and vocal public local defenders of slavery, largely because mastery, and all of the public privileges that went with it, was central to the gendered identities of these white slaveholding men.<sup>27</sup>

The past forty years have seen the study of slavery and abolition rise to become a thriving field of academic endeavour. New approaches to the Caribbean past have also helped to provide us with a richer picture of the society, culture and politics of the British Atlantic during the era of abolition and have begun to broaden our understanding of slaveholders in the region. Until very recently, however, those historians who have chosen to study British Caribbean slaveholders have focused their attention on elite colonists of the planter class, or 'plantocracy', and there has been a tendency to focus on the political and economic activities of this group. Moreover, in spite of recent work on eighteenth-century Jamaica and on slaveholders in other colonies, details of the social world and proslavery culture of white Jamaican colonists in the era of abolition remain poorly understood.

Before the rise of social history, imperial historians such as Frank Pitman and Richard Pares focused their attention on West Indian planters in the context of the British Atlantic economy and imperial politics. In 1928, Lowell Ragatz published *The Fall of the Planter Class in the British Caribbean*, arguing that the material fortunes of the planters began to suffer after the end of the Seven Years War in 1763 and that the Emancipation Bill of 1833 delivered 'the final blow at the old-time prosperity of the West India islands'. Ragatz's thesis helped to inspire part of the argument of Eric Williams's classic study *Capitalism and Slavery*, first published in 1944. According to Williams, the plantation economy entered a period of economic decline after the American Revolution, leaving the planters vulnerable to political attacks from other groups of capitalists. In 1977, Seymour Drescher took issue with this decline thesis, arguing that the plantation economy was in good health when the British parliament abolished the slave trade and that the planters' loss of production and profits had begun after 1807. The debate over the decline of the plantation economy has continued, although it still appears that Drescher was broadly justified in his claim that the British West Indies remained profitable and strategically important until after the ending of the slave trade and that the planters faced their most serious economic difficulties after the end of the Napoleonic Wars.<sup>28</sup>

British Caribbean planters have therefore been at the centre of scholarly discussions about the relationship between economic decline and abolition, but rather than engaging directly with the debate over the economic fortunes of the slaveholders, this book focuses on their cultural and social lives, topics that have received less attention from historians. Although the 1960s and 70s saw a rise in social history, studies of colonizers like slaveholders, were a relatively low priority for social historians of the Anglophone Caribbean. After the ending of British rule during the 1960s, historians followed the lead of scholars such as Orlando Patterson, whose 1968 book, *The Sociology of Slavery*, provided an extended discussion of the hitherto overlooked enslaved majority of Jamaica. The ensu-

ing decolonization of the study of Caribbean historiography has positioned the experiences of the oppressed at the centre of works on the region. Historians have studied slave demography and economic activities and they have shed light on the ways in which enslaved men and women resisted and opposed the slave system. Scholars have also considered groups beyond the sugar plantations. Gad Heuman has explored the political activities of free people of colour, and Mary Turner has looked at the role of missionaries in the disintegration of Jamaican slave society. Studies of livestock pens, urban centres and coffee plantations have further contributed to an increasingly detailed understanding of Jamaican slave society.<sup>29</sup>

Historians of the Caribbean have therefore retreated from a focus on colonial elites, but slaveholders have necessarily remained a point of focus. Historians have recognized that the master class in the Caribbean played an important part in the creation of the British Atlantic empire, and as Brathwaite notes, the slaveholders were important 'sources of power and change within Jamaican slave society'. In 1972, Richard Dunn published a pioneering account of the social and economic rise of the planter class in the seventeenth-century English Caribbean, and Richard Sheridan discussed the economic activities of the planter class before the American Revolution in his 1974 economic history of the British West Indies. Barry Higman's groundbreaking book *Slave Population and Economy in Jamaica* also shed light on patterns of slaveholding and management during the period between 1807 and emancipation. Several shorter studies and monographs on broader issues or other groups have also considered the outlook, power and influence of white slaveholders.<sup>30</sup>

Over the last decade, scholars have shown a renewed interest in the slaveholders, partly because of the development of Atlantic approaches to American colonial history. These approaches have sought to chart the creation of the British Atlantic system in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, as well as its transformation after the American Revolution, and have emphasized that the plantation societies of the Caribbean were as much part of British colonial America as the mainland colonies. Recent work by Trevor Burnard, Andrew O'Shaughnessy and Vincent Brown has helped to demonstrate the central importance of the Caribbean to this British Atlantic world, shedding valuable light on the demography, wealth, culture and politics of the British West Indies. Through his study of the diaries of the slaveholder Thomas Thistlewood, Burnard has also presented an intimate portrait of Jamaican society in the middle of the eighteenth century.<sup>31</sup>

Examinations of Atlantic connections are not entirely new. Their importance was recognized by C. L. R. James in 1938, when he published his classic study of the Haitian Revolution, *The Black Jacobins*, which demonstrated that the revolution had both local and transatlantic causes and consequences. Six years later, in *Capitalism and Slavery*, Williams set out to show how slavery in the British

Caribbean had impacted on the economy and society of the metropole. Catherine Hall has found these Caribbean precedents useful in her recent efforts to bring British and imperial history together in a single frame of analysis. Hall's recent study *Civilising Subjects* focuses on mission work and empire, concentrating on the relationship between Jamaica and Britain to illustrate the hypothesis that 'colony and metropole are terms which can be understood only in relation to each other'. In these ways it relates to wider recent endeavours to broaden the scope of British and colonial history by exploring global connections and imperial networks, seeking to show how change has been produced by combinations of global and local forces. David Lambert has also used these approaches to examine the culture politics and identity of white colonists in Barbados, providing valuable new insights onto the outlook of Caribbean slaveholders and their responses to abolitionism.<sup>32</sup>

This book seeks to build on such recent work, taking an Atlantic approach and combining detailed archival research on slaveholding society with an analysis of the cultural outlook of slaveholders in Jamaica during the decades leading up to emancipation. It adopts the sort of Atlantic perspective that David Armitage has defined as 'cis-Atlantic history'. 'Cis' literally means 'this side of', and cis-Atlantic studies aim to examine Atlantic themes from a particular vantage point, studying a localized history 'in relation to the wider Atlantic world'. Although they are primarily about slaveholders resident in Jamaica, the following chapters explore the lives and outlook of these colonists in the context of wider webs of connection.<sup>33</sup>

The first chapter uses slave registration data, probate inventories, tax records and property deeds to examine the composition of slaveholding society, and the second chapter uses published descriptions, letter collections and contemporary newspapers to examine the social and cultural world of the slaveholders. Combining such sources with court records, vestry minutes and electoral records, Chapter 3 examines public life in Jamaican slave society, concentrating on the roles and functions of local institutions. Chapters 4 and 5 go on to consider how colonists responded to challenges to their local practices during the era of abolition, using sources such as Governors' correspondence, proslavery publications and records kept by the local Assembly. Using contemporary published accounts, letters and evidence from local newspapers the next two chapters take a detailed look at the slaveholders' reaction to the crisis caused by the Jamaican slave uprising that began in 1831. The last chapter uses similar sources to consider the failure of the slaveholders' efforts to resist emancipation, examining their final compromise with the imperial government over the transition to freedom in Jamaica. Along with the epilogue, it shows that although white male slaveholders made determined efforts to preserve the benefits and privileges they derived from slavery, local and metropolitan opposition ensured that the institution was abolished and that this was an era of change.