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*The Society For Caribbean Studies Annual Conference Papers*

edited by Sandra Courtman

Vol.2 2001 ISSN 1471-2024

<http://www.scsonline.freemove.co.uk/olvol2.html>

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## **The Rumour Syndrome, Sectarian Missionaries and Nineteenth Century Slave Rebels of the British West Indies**

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### **ABSTRACT**

The central theme of this paper is the rumour syndrome that swept through slave populations in the British West Indian colonies by the late eighteenth century and throughout the first three decades of the nineteenth. The essence of this rumour was that slaves erroneously believed that the King of Britain and the imperial parliament had authorised their emancipation but that this decree was withheld by authorities in the colonies. The central concern of the paper is to provide a slave centered explanation for the emergence of that historical phenomenon that eventually became known as the rumour syndrome.

In British West Indian slavery history, there is a mistaken assumption that slaves were generally unresponsive to the servile regime to which planters in the British colonies subjected them. This assumption has partly been built on the explanation provided by abolitionists, planters and dissenting missionaries in accounting for the rising of slaves by the end of the eighteenth century and in the first three decades of the nineteenth. Emila da Costa in her recent work, "Crowns of Glory, Tears of Blood" has strongly condemned the European-centered explanation of these slave revolts. She chides, "...especially in the concept of the rumour syndrome, many of the records see the slaves as ciphers, as men and women who had risen either because they had been victimised by devious missionaries or because they had been victimised by godless planters and managers."1

Present day historians, fortunately, writing about the later slave rebellions in the British colonies have avoided the misinterpretation that slaves revolted fundamentally because they were influenced by one European group or the other. Abigail Bakan, Edward Kamau Brathwaite, Michael Craton and Mary Turner have all agreed that colonists or planters, missionaries and abolitionists contributed to the rebellions of the slaves in the final decades before emancipation but that their roles were proximate and secondary rather than fundamental.2 Slaves revolted primarily because of their inherent desire for freedom.

The success of historians in distancing the influence of European groups from explanations of the rising of the slaves, however, has not entirely solved the problem of the passivity with which slaves are usually presented in British West Indian slavery history. The erroneous assumption that the rumour syndrome was shaped, crystallized and diffused not by the

slaves themselves but by those same groups who had misrepresented their role in the pre-emancipation revolts of the slaves remains in tact.

The object of this paper, consequently, is to determine whether the rumour syndrome was a historical phenomenon that depended more on the sectarian missionaries for its widespread presence among the slave populations of the British West Indies or upon the slaves themselves. A similar investigation regarding the influence of the abolitionists and the planters in the colonies in the emergence of the rumour syndrome is also necessary. The work of the missionaries and their presence among the slaves, however, along with the slave revolts of Barbados in 1816, Demerara in 1823 and Jamaica in 1831 - 1832 will be the focus here. The attention that will be given to sectarian missionaries in this paper is justified by the fact that their roles in influencing the slaves to hold fast to the mistaken notion of freedom granted but withheld has been more exaggerated than that of the abolitionists and the planters in the colonies.

## INTRODUCTION

In his extensive study of slave revolts, Michael Craton explains what the term 'rumour syndrome' refers to and how it gained currency in the history of the British West Indian colonies. He notes that:

After every plot or revolt, from at least 1790 onward, the planters provided evidence that word had been circulating among the slaves, usually to the effect that actual decrees [of emancipation] had been made by the king, the imperial parliament, or the Colonial Office and had been withheld by the local regime.<sup>1</sup>

Craton has also indicated that the rumour developed as a ploy of the planters to block slavery reform and as the direct consequence of the work of the abolitionists and the missionaries for and among the slaves.<sup>2</sup> Essentially, the rumour syndrome has emerged as a theme to analyse the eruption of the late eighteenth and nineteenth century slave revolts in the British West Indian colonies. Emilia Da Costa has found fault with this perception. She chides, "... especially in the concept of the rumour syndrome, many of the records see the slaves as ciphers, as men and women who had risen either because they had been manipulated by devious missionaries or because they had been victimised by godless planters and managers."<sup>3</sup>

While records left by planters, missionaries and abolitionists insist that the rumour syndrome was a significant cause of the nineteenth century slave revolts in the British West Indies, contemporary historians have avoided this error of judgement. Abigail Bakan, Edward Kamau Brathwaite and Mary Turner, for example, agree that the rumour exerted a subversive influence on the slaves but that the primary stimulus of revolt was internal rather than external.<sup>4</sup>

Unfortunately, distancing the rumour from the cause of the nineteenth century slave revolts has contributed to cementing a fundamental assumption that has been left largely unchallenged. The historiography assumes that the substance and energy of the rumour was supplied not by slaves but by those same groups who were responsible for the misrepresentation of their roles in slave rebellions.

The objective of this paper, consequently, is to determine whether the rumour syndrome actually represented a reality for the slaves dependent on agents outside of themselves. To undertake this assessment, the work of the dissenting Christian missionaries among the slaves along with the Barbados slave revolt of 1816, the Demerara revolt of 1823 and the Jamaican revolt of 1831 – 1832 shall be re-investigated. The influence of the planters and of

the abolitionists respectively, in spreading the rumour is also in need of re-examination. It is more glaring, however, that in accounting for the influence of all three groups of Europeans on the slaves, overemphasis on the role of the missionaries in shaping the rumour exceeds that ascribed to the abolitionists and the planters.

### **Void of Sectarians**

In Barbados, where it was later proven that no sectarian missionaries operated during the outbreak of the 1816 slave rebellion, non-conformists were, nevertheless, blamed for the erroneous thinking of the slaves. Planters agreed with Pallmer, a pro-slavery British MP, who blamed the sectarians " ... who preached treason ... under the disguise of Christian doctrine."<sup>5</sup> Governor Sir James Leith, who returned to Barbados from Guadeloupe on 24 April 1816, reinforced the notion that the missionaries misled the slaves about their status. Leith concluded that " ... ill-disposed persons, who have been endeavouring to induce a belief that the slaves were actually made free, but that the manumissions were improperly withheld from them"<sup>6</sup> created the confusion.

The extent to which Europeans were missing the point in blaming each other for planting seeds of resistance in the minds of the slaves while ignoring the initiative of the slaves themselves is well reflected in an article carried in *The Edinburgh Review*. The author of that article observed that the Barbados revolt

... was confidently ascribed to the machinations of Methodist missionaries, until it was, unluckily for this argument, discovered that there had not been a single Methodist missionary in the island for two years previous to the event.<sup>7</sup>

In Barbados at least it is clear that the slaves invention of delayed emancipation was void of missionary influence.

### **The Introduction of the Missionaries**

Abolitionist demand for the spiritual and moral reform of slaves throughout the British West Indies led to the flourishing of missionary societies in Jamaica by the late eighteenth century and in Demerara by the first decade of the nineteenth. The established Anglican Church that operated in the colonies catered more to the needs of the whites and failed to attract the slaves. Wesleyans, Presbyterians, Moravians, Methodists and Baptists of the dissenting sects filled the gap. The first missionaries to Jamaica were the Wesleyans who arrived on the island in 1789.<sup>8</sup> The first serious efforts to propagate Christianity among Demerara slaves began in 1808.<sup>9</sup> The proprietor of Le Resouvenir cotton plantation on the East Coast, Hilbert Hermanus Post, had appealed to the London Missionary Society to send him a missionary to reside on his plantation at his expense to work among the slaves.<sup>10</sup> In response to his request, the Reverend John Wray arrived at Le Resouvenir.<sup>11</sup> John Davies later followed him.<sup>12</sup>

In spite of planter bias and opposition, Craton records that "By 1834, there were 63 Moravian missionaries in the British West Indies, 58 Methodists, 17 Baptists [all in Jamaica] and perhaps a dozen other non-conformist missionaries."<sup>13</sup>

### **Mean and Clumsy Fabrication**

Planters in Demerara were convinced that independent missionaries encouraged slaves to invent and seize hold of the idea that the King's gift of freedom had been denied. The Reverend John Smith of the London Missionary Society was singled out for attack. In 1817,

the Methodist clergyman had arrived in the colony to take up his post at the Bethel Chapel where John Wray and John Davies had pioneered the work. The colonists insisted that "The plot was formed and hatched at the chapel, as those who attended it were the chief leaders of the rebels."<sup>14</sup>

The planters also used the so-called testimonies of slaves to confirm their suspicions concerning the source from which the rumour gained strength among them. The guilt of the missionaries, particularly that of Smith's, seemed undeniable by the words of Jack, the son of Gladstone who was a deacon in Smith's chapel in Le Resouvenir. Jack had been reported to confess that

Before this court, I solemnly declare that many of the lessons and discourses, and the parts of the Scripture selected for us in chapel, tended to make us dissatisfied with our situations as slaves, and, had there been no Methodists on the East Coast, there would have been no revolt.<sup>15</sup>

The Demerara planters ignored the obvious way in which the submission of the testimonies of slaves as evidence of the guilt of the missionaries was undermined by the fact that those testimonies coincided so neatly with their own view regarding the effect of missionary work on the slaves. The position they had taken on the rumour was made even more questionable when Jack received a much lighter form of punishment than that normally reserved for those found guilty of the crime of insurrection. Craton notes that " ... he ended his days under sentence of banishment in St Lucia."<sup>16</sup> The leniency shown to him was payment for his condemnation of Smith and other sectarian missionaries in Demerara.

The plantocracy of Jamaica was also confident that the missionaries contributed significantly to the spreading of the rumour. In the *Jamaican Courant*, it was stated that

... certain persons – white persons too, called ministers of religion, [told] them that they were to be free after Christmas, or at the beginning of the year, and that after that period, they were to work no longer for their masters! Could they be ministers of God, of religion or friends of the human race who would tell them a falsehood?<sup>17</sup>

Implied in this accusation of the planters was the idea that in spreading the rumour the missionaries left nothing to the imagination of dull and ignorant slaves who could never on their own be led to anticipate freedom.

### **Ardour to their Hopes**

An objective examination of the interaction between missionaries and slaves would reveal that indeed the men of God did exert some influence over the way slaves of the nineteenth century began to view in a new light their enslavement. Their presence and labours among the slaves encouraged the latter to conclude that there were white men who took their side in some aspects at least of their condition.

Slaves felt a bond with the sectarian missionaries because the men of God sympathised with their suffering. An extract from the diary of John Smith substantiates this claim. On Sunday 4 May 1817 Smith recorded:

Mr B. called today. He complains much of the hardness of his situation. He says that the master was very severe to his Negroes, and that they work from five in the morning until seven or eight at night ... He says he has seen the Negroes to have 50 or 100 lashes without any apparent provocation. When either master or manager are in bad humour, they will vent their spite on the Negroes.<sup>18</sup>

It was the same in Jamaica where the Baptist missionary, the Reverend William Knibb, has been called the "Parson Smith of the Christmas rebellion."<sup>19</sup> Craton reinforces this description by observing that in Jamaica "Presbyterian, Wesleyan and Moravian ministers, with varying degrees of plausibility, were able to dissociate themselves and most of their congregations from the taint of insurrection. Not so the Baptists."<sup>20</sup> Burchell, the Baptist preacher from whose church, Sam Sharpe, the leader of the rebellion had emerged, may have been just as unpopular as was Smith in Demerara. He was in England, however, when the rebellion erupted. Knibb was not so fortunate. His unpopularity was also due to the fact that he too listened to the complaints of the slaves of his congregation at Falmouth. Knibb later explained that "Some of them came to me and stated that their time was taken away a great deal, that they had not the time that was allowed them by law, and that they were severely beaten."<sup>21</sup>

Many missionaries were also personally revolted by the system of slavery. Slaves, who were able to sense such revulsion, would have had ample reason to imagine that the missionaries would lend support to any notion, however unfounded, which resulted in emancipation. Following the rebellion in Jamaica, Knibb's heart-rending declaration was "Thank God, now I'll have slavery down!"<sup>22</sup> John Smith's senses were also jolted by slavery. He had written, "O Slavery! Thou offspring of the devil, ... when will thou cease to exist?"<sup>23</sup>

Sectarian missionaries introduced contradictions in areas of slave society that could have contributed to augmenting the rumour among slaves that freedom was unlawfully denied. One of these was the contentious relationship that developed between white missionaries and white planters. Missionaries attempted to banish the practice of Sunday market since it affected attendance at chapel and violated the Christians' fourth commandment. Planters stubbornly resisted this attempt. Provisions of the slave market were vital for supplementing the meagre allowance of their slaves. Planters were also unwilling to alter this arrangement because it was attended with the request of granting another day in the week to conduct such sales; a day that could be spent working on the plantations.

The introduction of nightly religious meetings by the missionaries increased the friction in slave society. Planters rightly feared that these meetings undermined their attempts to restrict the unsupervised movements of the slaves. They provided excellent opportunities for the planning of slave revolts. Governor Wade of Barbados drew this to the attention of Lord Bathurst at the Colonial Office. He stated, "Recent occurrences at Demerara have proved the danger of Negroes being brought together in numbers at present, for the supposed purpose of religious instruction."<sup>24</sup> Additionally, planters complained that the productivity of slaves after attending these nocturnal gatherings was seriously compromised. Consequently, it is little wonder that one of the grievances that missionaries often complained about was that the local authorities passed legislation banning the conduct of candle light religious services in which a preponderance of slaves was in attendance.

Another sore point that arose between missionaries and planters was the intention to teach slaves to read Bible passages and sing hymns that the planters believed would be misconstrued by them. This was used as a justification to refuse the granting of licenses to sectarian missionaries. The Negroes keenly observed the wrangling that swayed back and forth between the two groups of white men. The poor relationship confirmed in their minds that the power of the master in the colonial society was slowly eroding.<sup>25</sup>

This was the extent to which the missionaries sparked the ideological rejection of slavery manifested in the rumour syndrome. Their relative kindness to the slaves encouraged the latter to entertain the likelihood that they had allies in the colonies willing and able to pull down the strong hold of their masters.

## The Object of Their Mission

The manifesto of the sectarians who arrived in the British West Indies to work among the slave population is one of the clearest indications that they could not but accommodate rather than oppose slavery. The following directive of the London Missionary Society typically represented the advice given to all ministers bound for the West Indies:

You are going to preach the gospel to poor Africans in a state of slavery to man. They have been torn from their native country, and reduced to a degraded situation. As such they will be the subjects of your commiseration. But it is not to relieve them from their servile condition that you visit them. That is out of your power. Nor would it be proper but extremely wrong, to insinuate anything which might render them discontented with a state of servitude, or lead them to any measures injurious to their masters: this would be to defeat the object of your missions. These poor creatures are slaves in a much worse sense; they are slaves of ignorance, sin and Satan; it is to rescue them from this miserable condition by the gospel of Christ that you are now going.<sup>26</sup>

The mission societies, like the planters in the colonies, recognised from the outset that slaves could misconstrue their purpose and so they set for their clergymen distinct borders to indicate the form of Christianity to which slaves were to be introduced. Missionaries were indoctrinated to tolerate the compromise between the injustices of slavery and the legitimacy of holding property in man. They were to overlook Christian principles of equality and justice and to stress obedience and submission. The missionaries had strict orders not to meddle with temporal enslavement but to work assiduously for the spiritual freedom of the slaves. They were precluded from imparting to the slaves the whole counsel of God.

The missionaries greatly endeavoured to meet the object of their mission. The catechism, for example, that John Wray wrote for the slaves soon after his arrival at Le Resouvenir in Demerara reflected an earnest and deliberate effort to inculcate in them a right attitude to their duties and to their masters.

Q.: What are the duties of servants and slaves to their masters, owners and managers?

R.: Respect, faithfulness, obedience and diligence.

Q.: What is respect?

A.: An acknowledgement of their superiority and authority and a respectful manner of speaking of them, to them and a becoming manner.<sup>27</sup>

Wray's catechism underlines the point that far from imbibing the slaves with subversive rumours about their status, the missionaries acted only to develop a work force motivated internally by social and spiritual stimuli rather than by the external force of the whip.

The Reverend John Smith, Wray's successor, also acted in accordance with the jealous and watchful expectations of the planters in ministering to the slaves. Wray testified that Smith was

... watched with the most suspicious vigilance. But such was the upright and blameless course ... he was enabled to pursue and such was the prudent as well as the pious care with which he conducted himself, that even his most inveterate enemies were unable to fix a blot on his character.<sup>28</sup>

According to the testimony of John Wray, the planters of Demerara could point to no aspect of Smith's ministry to implicate him in spreading the rumour that opposed the continuation of slavery in the colony.

### **Spiritual Police Officers**

The opportunity for missionaries to choose to observe or ignore their stated mission was minimised by the fact that they were often dependent on the patron of the planters. Planters subsidised mission buildings, paid the stipends of missionaries and tolerated them as residents on their estates. James Stewart, for example, a Scotsman who rose to prominence in Jamaica, lent the Wesleyans the old police office in Falmouth to use as a church until they had constructed their own building.<sup>29</sup> In Demerara, a small group of planters " ... countenanced the missionaries as might be proved by the subscription lists and the salaries contributed by the Colonial Treasury to some of them."<sup>30</sup>

The price of this patronage was high. Planters expected missionaries to improve the work ethic of their slaves and in the years just prior to the outbreak of rebellion, some planters did admit that missionaries met their expectations. The manager of Success Plantation in Demerara complimented the influence of Christianity on the attitude of the slaves.

... astonished at the wonderful change that has taken place among them. They formerly were of a very rebellious disposition, and not at all backward to insurrections. ... But now their leisure time is spent in prayer, praise and receiving, and communicating religious instruction and instead of making them discontent and indolent in their work, as some ignorant persons suppose, it has quite the contrary effect.<sup>31</sup>

Planters later accused the missionaries of corrupting the minds of slaves. Before the rebellions, however, some planters admitted that the missionaries helped to stabilise the servile regime. One Moravian missionary commented that he and his colleagues were virtually " ... spiritual police officers sent out to care for the interests of the proprietor."<sup>32</sup> Christianity, as planters often insisted, was potentially inimical to the continuation of slavery. In this battle, however, the planters won the upper hand. They were generally successful in resisting any attempt to give free circulation to religious doctrine among the slaves.

### **Preaching to Themselves**

The missionaries' attempt to apply a bland interpretation to Christianity was inconsequential. The slaves had already taken the significant step of interpreting the message of Christianity in their own way. The sectarians preached of spiritual liberty while they tolerated temporal bondage. The slaves rejected the contradictions and limitations of this brand of Christianity by tagging on their political agenda to their new religious experience. They extended and even transformed the meaning of certain Biblical texts. Favourite portions of scripture among rebel slaves, for example, were "No man can serve two masters" and "Whom the Son of Man sets free is free indeed."<sup>33</sup> Abigail Bakan observes that slaves used these texts " ... to inspire confidence in the struggle for freedom."<sup>34</sup> Slaves used the Bible to support their belief in the equality of all men. In Demerara they insisted, "God had made them of the same flesh and blood as the whites, that they were tired of being slaves to them, that they should be free and they would not work anymore."<sup>35</sup> The missionaries did not teach this militant brand of religion to the slaves. They took the initiative in extending the parameters of Christianity and in this extension, the rumour syndrome was distinctly reflected.

In making the Christian message conform to their aspirations for freedom, the slaves went so far as to mix Christianity with aspects of their inherited African religions. This syncretism manifested itself in the slaves " ... fervent adherence to hymn singing, call and response in

chapel services, drumming, dancing, spirit obsession, and speaking in tongues."<sup>36</sup> The importance of secret meetings, [often used to formulate strategies for rebellion] dreams and oaths among slave converts also reflected strong African religious influences. The slaves' unique assimilation of Christianity confirmed their tendency to reason independently of their Christian ministers. An assessment of this tendency can be borrowed from Genovese's analysis of the missionary presence among slaves in North America. Genovese has concluded that "The whites preached to the niggers and the niggers preached to themselves."<sup>37</sup>

### **Standing Alone**

The missionaries renounced authorship of the rumour when they learnt of the contemplation of the slaves and sternly rebuked them for repeating such ill-founded information. The Presbyterian missionary in Jamaica, George Blyth, for instance, rebuffed his slave congregation when he learnt of their intention to act upon the rumour.<sup>38</sup> Knibb entreated the slaves in vain to put the idea out of their heads. "Hear me," he begged, "I love your souls. I would not tell you a lie for the world. What you have been told is false – false as hell can make it. I entreat you not to believe it, but to go to your work as usual."<sup>39</sup>

In Demerara parson Smith recorded in his diary a similar response to a letter concerning the rumour that he received from a slave called Jackey. He wrote, " ... hasty, violent or concerted measures are quite contrary to the religion we profess, and I hope you will have nothing to do with them."<sup>40</sup>

The slaves rejected the attempted dissuasions of the missionaries. Turner observes that they became " ... sullen, resentful and then openly furious."<sup>41</sup> Blyth's Presbyterian congregation was " ... disappointed and offended with him."<sup>42</sup> The Baptists slaves at Salter's Hill in Jamaica were " ... perfectly furious and would not listen to ... dissuasions from engaging in such a perilous enterprise ... They accused their ministers of deserting them, and threatened to take revenge upon them."<sup>43</sup> Slaves resolutely refused to yield to the exhortation of the missionaries to await patiently their day of liberation. They independently decided to hold on to and act upon the rumour of freedom granted but denied. The prospect of standing up for what they believed to be their lawful rights without the support of those whom they had recently considered friends did not deter them from their fixed purpose. Confronted with the choice of yielding to missionary influence or standing on their own, they chose the latter.

### **Long Tradition of Resistance**

The sectarians had entered a mission field to work among a people who were already profoundly seeped in a tradition of ideological and actual rebellion to enslavement. This condition was not merely incidental but highly favourable to the thriving of the rumour.

The starting point of slaves' resistance to European captivity was in Africa on the coast and aboard ships in the Atlantic crossing. John Atkins, a British slave trader, reported one fairly well known slave revolt on an African coastal village that took place in 1720 led by a captured African called Chief Tamba. This revolt occurred in Rio Nunez Valley in Zenegambia.<sup>44</sup> Tamba succeeded in eluding his captors in 1720 but in 1721 he was captured and lost his life aboard ship in a second stubborn attempt at freedom.<sup>45</sup>

Captain William Snelgrave, who participated in the Guinea trade for nearly thirty years, has provided accounts of four attempted mutinies staged by slaves during their forced migration. These took place aboard *The Eagle Galley* in 1704, (a slaver captained by his father) *The Henry* and *The Elizabeth* in 1721, and *The Ferres Galley* in 1722.<sup>46</sup> Snelgrave's analysis of the slave rebellion aboard *The Henry* of London looked forward to plantation revolts in the

Americas. The captain commented that there were " ... 500 slaves on board, 300 were men, 50 white people all in health ... Yet they nevertheless mutined, tho' they had little prospect of succeeding."<sup>47</sup> Snelgrave's observation strongly confirms the view that slaves really needed no other motivation to resist their enslavement than the desire to reclaim their liberty. When Snelgrave questioned the slaves in an attempt to assert the motive of their conduct, they answered, "I was a great rogue to buy them, in order to carry them away from their own country; and that they were resolved to regain their liberty if possible."<sup>48</sup> Slaves transported across the Atlantic all the combustibles that made light work of setting off any rumour among them pertaining to freedom.

The war for freedom between European masters and African slaves remained unbroken in the New World plantation societies. Slaves in Barbados, British Guiana and especially Jamaica were no exception to this rule.

In Barbados where local conditions made slave uprisings comparatively rare, there existed, nevertheless, a tradition of active resistance to slavery. In 1675, 1683, 1692, 1708 and 1805 planters uncovered plots against the system in that colony.<sup>49</sup>

The British had seized Guiana from the Dutch by 1803. Thus, the record of slave revolts in that territory reflects that personalities mattered little as far as the freedom struggle was concerned. Slave uprisings in British Guiana included the Berbice revolts of 1733 – 1734, 1749, 1752, 1762, and 1763 and the Essesquibo revolts of 1732, 1744, 1772 and 1834 as well as the Demerara revolts of 1795, 1804, 1807 and 1823.<sup>50</sup>

Craton provides an exhaustive chronology of revolts in Jamaica for which more than one hundred slaves in each episode were involved.<sup>51</sup> Ragatz has calculated that "Over a dozen outbreaks occurred in Jamaica alone during the eighteenth century. The most widespread erupted in 1760 costing the lives of sixty Europeans and four hundred coloured inhabitants."<sup>52</sup>

In examining the concept of the rumour syndrome, historians have sufficiently proven that the rumour was only a proximate rather than the fundamental cause of the nineteenth century slave revolts. The establishment of this truth is not merely enough. The record of slave revolts also demonstrates that the rumour itself constituted for the slaves an articulation of their fondest hopes for freedom. It was hardly necessary for any external source to give birth to a principle replete with such significance to their very existence.

## **Conclusion**

The record of missionary work among British West Indian slaves in the late eighteenth/nineteenth century negates the validity of the dominant position occupied by the dissenting ministers in the shaping of the rumour syndrome. Dissenting missionaries were prevented from imparting to slaves the full truth of the gospel and, more often than not, they conformed to the expectations of the plantocracy. When the contemplation of slaves became clear to them, they openly renounced any toleration of the notion of delayed emancipation and attempted to exert their influence to produce a subservient labour force. Additionally, the evidence that planters advanced to support their accusation of the missionaries in the crystallisation of the rumour often proved faulty as the case in Barbados plainly demonstrated.

On the other hand, in significant ways slave rebels affirm the position that the life blood of that historical phenomenon now referred to as the rumour syndrome flowed from their very veins. The slaves had repudiated the counsel of their ministers and acted secretly, independently and in defiance of the subservient Christian doctrine they had been taught. Their ability to blend African religious rites with Christianity and their tendency to read

political significance within Biblical texts were sure indicators that they were autonomously exercising their natural ability to reason. This unique assimilation of Christianity mirrored the rejection of slavery that was inherent in the notion of the rumour. The slaves also demonstrated that their faith in the rumour was an extension of the two hundred-years war that they fought against slavery, a condition that made ripe the concept of the rumour syndrome. It cannot be absolutely asserted that the slaves invented the rumour but there is little doubt that the missionaries' presence did not sustain it. The rumour syndrome was a form of resistance to slavery at the centre of which were the slaves whose ardent desire for freedom provided the fuel to spread and crystallise it.

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This paper was given at The Society For Caribbean Studies Conference held at The University of Nottingham 2nd-4th July 2001.

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