

THE NATIONAL ARCHIVES

SPOTLIGHT ON

Colonial Office: Baptist War

Multi-Symptom
Maximum Strength
MTREX



Key Stages 3-4 | Empire and industry 1750 - 1850

Video resource

Colonial Office: Records about the Baptist War, 1831

We hope you enjoyed watching our Education Service video with Records Specialist Daniel Gilfoyle looking at records from the Colonial Office. This video focusses on two documents relating to the Baptist War in 1831 led by Samuel Sharpe against slavery in Jamaica which shed light on resistance to slavery in the British Caribbean.

Suitable for:

KS 3-4

Time period:

Empire and industry

1750 - 1850

Our collections contain ideas, language and imagery from original records which reflect historical perspectives and attitudes. Some may be considered offensive. However, we think it important to show them as accurate representations of the record to help us understand the past.

Contents

Tasks	Page 3
Source 1	Page 6
Source 2	Page 8
Connections to Curriculum	Page 12
Related resources	Page 13

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Tasks

Watch the video then try and answer the following questions:

- What was the Colonial Office?
- When was it created?
- What type of sources can be found in the Colonial Office collection?
- What does this reveal about the range of material available?
- What is the code of the document examined in the video?

Source 1: A poster entitled 'To the Rebellious Slaves'.

Catalogue ref: CO 137/181

This was a despatch sent from Jamaica to the Colonial Office in London, 1832.

- What does the code reveal about the document examined in the video?
- What is the date of the document examined?
- What type of document is it?
- What events does the document concern?
- Why do you think this document was created in the form of a poster?
- What does the language used in the poster reveal about the attitude of British colonial authorities in Jamaica towards the enslaved?
- How are font size, use of capital letters, and italics used within the poster to threaten those involved in this rebellion against slavery?
- What information does this poster not reveal about these events? Can you explain why this is the case?
- What does the poster infer about the British Empire at that time?

Tasks

Source 2: Extract from a return of individuals or 'freeman' tried and sentenced for their involvement in the Baptist War.

Catalogue ref: CO 137/185

A return of every Freeman tried and convicted during the late Rebellion in Jamaica or in consequence thereof, distinguishing in separate columns.

Some of the language used in this document to categorise different individuals is considered racist.

The term 'Race' can be considered as a social construct (meaning something that has come about through complex social and political processes, rather than being grounded in science). Therefore, language relating to it depends on its context in time and location and is often contested and frequently problematic.

The following definitions provide some information on how the different social groups described in this document, were racialised (given often negatively evaluated characteristics on account of their ethnic backgrounds).

Definitions

"Sambo" as a term was used in a broader sense as a derogatory term for black people, though here it seems to be used as a racial category to refer a person of mixed African and European or Indigenous American ancestry in Spanish/Latin America.

'Brown' is used as an umbrella term here to refer to those listed as 'sambo' and 'brown' itself. There do not appear to be any other terms used to describe people in the document. 'Brown' appears as a distinct category from Creole (rooted in the Americas) but incorporates Sambo (rooted in Spanish America), so it would be those of mixed heritage from outside the Caribbean.

Tasks

'Creole' as a term was used to describe people of mixed European and Black African descent born in the colonies due to migration patterns, often born in the Americas. [Creole also can mean a language that has arisen from simplifying and mixing different languages.]

'Black' as a term has different meanings in different contexts. In this context it is used to refer to people of African descent. In European sources, the term "black" has been used to describe many different non-African people of colour.

'White': meaning a white European colonist.

'Freemen': could refer to different people of any race who were free under the law i.e. not a serf or enslaved person. Freemen could work anywhere; they could work on the plantations, but also in towns or docks etc. They were essentially not enslaved. It seems that there were according to this document, some freemen who supported the rebellion of enslaved – it is not typically a racialized term, and they could be black or white.

Vide: This is a Latin legal term which means: 'see' other information relating this matter.

- What does the language used in this document to categorise and describe individuals reveal about attitudes towards race at the time?
- What does this document reveal about attitudes towards crime and punishment?
- What does this document reveal about the British Empire?
- Can you see what information may be lacking from this source?
- What is the advantage of looking at this document alongside Document 1?
- What other sources beyond Colonial Office records, would be important to explore when studying this topic?
- Find out about more about the significance of Samuel Sharpe and his leadership of Baptist War against slavery in Jamaica.
- Use The National Archives [research guide](#) on Slavery and the British Transatlantic slave trade to find other records.

Source 1: Poster entitled 'To the Rebellious Slaves', 1832

Catalogue Ref: CO 137/181



*Head-Quarters, Montego-Bay,
St. James's, Jan. 2, 1832.*

TO
**THE REBELLIOUS
SLAVES.**

NEGROES,

YOU have taken up arms against your Masters, and have burnt and plundered their Houses and Buildings. Some wicked persons have told you that the King has made you free, and that your Masters withhold your freedom from you. In the name of the King, I come amongst you, to tell you that you are misled. I bring with me numerous Forces to punish the guilty, and all who are found with the Rebels will be put to death, without Mercy. You cannot resist the King's Troops. Surrender yourselves, and beg that your crime may be pardoned. All who yield themselves up at any Military Post *immediately*, provided they are not principals and chiefs in the burnings that have been committed, will receive His Majesty's gracious pardon. All who hold out, will meet with certain death.

WILLOUGHBY COTTON,
Maj. General Commandg.

GOD SAVE THE KING.

Source 1: Transcript

Head-Quarters, Montego-Bay, St James's Jan. 2, 1832.

TO THE REBELLIOUS SLAVES.

NEGROES,

YOU, have taken up arms against your Masters, and have burnt and plundered their Houses and Buildings. Some wicked persons have told you that the king has made you free, and that your Masters withhold your freedom from you. In the name of the King, I come amongst you, to tell you that you are misled. I bring with me numerous Forces to punish the guilty, and all who are found with the Rebels will be put to death, without Mercy. You cannot resist the King's Troops. Surrender yourselves, and beg that your crime may be pardoned. All who yield themselves up at any Military Post immediately, provided they are not principals and chiefs in the burnings that have been committed, will receive His Majesty's gracious pardon. All who hold out, will meet with certain death.

WILLOUGHBY COTTON

[Major] General [Commander]

GOD SAVE THE KING

Source 2: Return of individuals or 'freeman' tried and sentenced for their involvement in the Baptist War, 1832. Catalogue Ref: CO 137/185

A Return of every Freeman tried and convicted during the late Rebellion in Jamaica, or in consequence thereof, distinguishing in separate Columns

Name	Age	White	Brown	Black	English	Creole	Spanish	or Trade	Residence	Crime	Sentence	Remarks
Joseph Rodrigues			Santo			Creole			Jamaica	For concealing with the Rebels, and assisting them, and for seducing them, and for furnishing them with arms.	Death	See Tabular Court Martial page 57.
Pias Rodrigues			Santo			Creole			Jamaica	ditto	30 lashes & banishment for life.	ditto
Thomas Chambers Esq			Black			Creole			Jamaica	Rebellion	30 lashes & banishment for life.	ditto except
Alexander Campbell			Brown			Creole				Inciting to homicide	Death	
James McIntosh			do			do				Inciting the	do	vide Envelope
Donald McIntosh			do			do				doers to	do	Part of way (page 1)
John Lorie			do			do				Rebellion	do	Secured Attorney
William White			do			do				Murder of Etn. Knapp	do	
Saml Sampson				Black		do				affronted with intent to kill	do	
John Elroy		White								Sedition	14 days imprisonment	vide Tabular Court Martial page 241
John Sutton	41									Rebellion	Death	vide Tabular Court Martial page 241
Elizabeth Ball									Montego Bay	Sedition	24 lashes & banishment for life	vide Tabular Court Martial page 241
Jack Moncrieff										Rebellion	Transportation	vide Vol 2 Montego Bay Court Martial page 291
Mr James				Black					Hanover	ditto	Death and carried into Court Martial	vide Tabular Court Martial page 20.

Source 2: Transcript

Name	Age	White	Brown	Black	English -man	Creole	African	Occup -ation or trade	Residence	Crime	Sentence	Remarks
Joseph Rodrigues			Sambo			Creole			Trelawny	For concealing with Rebellious slaves & not revealing their traitorous conduct and for aiding them and furnishing them with arms	Death and execution	Vide: Trelawny Court Martial page 81.
Elias Rodrigues			Sambo			Creole			Trelawny	Ditto	300 lashes & transport -ation for life.	Ditto
Thomas Chambers Bailey				Black		Creole			Trelawny	Rebellion	300 lashes & transport -ation for life.	Ditto page 91
Alexander Campbell			Brown			Creole		Killer of hogs		Inciting to insurrection	Death & execution) Vide enclosure) No,1 of
James McIntosh			Ditto			Ditto		Planter		Inciting	Ditto)Cases tried at) Cornwall

Source 2: Transcript (cont.)

Name	Age	White	Brown	Black	English -man	Creole	African	Occupation or trade	Residence	Crime	Sentence	Remarks
Donald McIntosh			Ditto			Ditto		Carpenter		the Slaves	Ditto) Assizes.) Recommend to mercy
John Largie			Ditto			Ditto		Carpenter		to Insurrection	Ditto- commuted to transport -ation)))
William Waite						Ditto		Carpenter		Murder of EM Sharpe.	Death & execution	
Samuel Sampson				Black				Sailor		Assault with attempt to murder		
John Ellery			White					Sailor		Sedition	14 days imprison -ment	
John Sutton	41									Rebellion	Death & execution	Vide: St. Elizabeth Court Martial p.54
Elizabeth Ball									Montego Bay	Sedition	24 lashes & 6 months imprison -ment	Vide:Montego Bay Court Martial Vol.1 p.32

Source 2: Transcript (cont.)

Name	Age	White	Brown	Black	English -man	Creole	African	Occupation or trade	Residence	Crime	Sentence	Remarks
Rick Moncrieff								Carpenter		Rebellion	Transporation	Vide Vol.2 Montego Bay Courts Martial p.291
Ann James				Black					Hanover	Ditto	Death and carried into execution	Vide Hanover Court Martial no. 20

Connections to Curriculum

Key stage 3

Ideas, political power, industry and empire: Britain, 1745-1901: Britain's transatlantic slave trade: its effects and its eventual abolition

Key stage 4

AQA GCSE History: Britain: Migration, empires and the people: c790 to the present day

Related resources



Bussa's rebellion¹

How and why did the enslaved Africans of Barbados rebel in 1816?



Slavery²

How did the Abolition Acts of 1807 and 1833 affect the slave trade?



Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic Histories³

This resource contains a hyperlinked list of National Archives current resources for Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic histories on The National Archives website.

1 <https://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/education/resources/bussas-rebellion/>

2 <https://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/education/resources/slavery/>

3 <https://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/education/resources/black-asian-and-minority-ethnic-histories/>



Why do our hyperlinks come with footnotes?

Our resources are designed to be printed and used in classrooms, which means hyperlinks aren't always accessible digitally. We include the full link at the bottom of the page so that you can type in the address without distracting from the main text of the lesson materials.

Did you know?

The National Archives Education Service also offers free workshops onsite in Kew and online in your classroom.

Our [Onsite Workshops](#) are available for free here at The National Archives and allow students to experience genuine original documents reflecting over 1000 years of history. From Elizabeth I's signature to the telegrams of the sinking Titanic, students love the wow-factor of being able to see real history on the desk in front of them.

Our [Online Workshops](#) allow our Education Officers to teach through your projector, leading discussions and guiding students through activities based around original documents. All you need is a computer with a projector, webcam and microphone. We'll arrange a test call before your session to check the tech is working.

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