

# **EDUCATION AND SOCIAL MOBILITY: THE CASE OF THE JAMAICAN PEASANT**

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## **Introduction.**

The Jamaican peasantry arose following emancipation when some ex-slaves left the plantations and established free villages. The act of leaving the plantation was a manifestation of the resistance that had existed toward slavery and plantation life. It was a bold statement against white planter domination and an expression of black independence. The plantocracy heard the statement and understood the expression. Consequently, they did everything to discourage and undermine free villagers. The Jamaican peasantry was therefore founded in the context of conflict between dominant and subordinate groups in the Jamaican society.

## **The Four Major Institutions of Free Village Communities**

The free villages were built around the institutions of the family, the school, the church and the small farm. Each of these four elements, which constituted the infrastructure of these communities, represented a significant departure from plantation life and slavery. Some comment is necessary about each of these four elements.

During slavery there was no room for the family as a parent child group living in a home. There was still less room for the development of those stable relationships among a wider circle of kin living in permanent contact and visiting regularly and freely among each other. The residential unit in the plantation system was formed mostly by mothers and children. The responsibility of maintaining and protecting the residential unit rested with the slave owner and not the father. Accordingly, the father's place in the family was never secure. He had no externally sanctioned authority over the family or household and could be physically removed from it at any time.

The family living in a home close to other homes with other families restored what slavery and plantation organization had broken. Fathers living permanently with their wives and children and protecting their families affirmed and re-established what plantation organization and slavery had negated. The restoration of traditional family life, as it had been known and practiced in Africa, was indicting and abandoning the matrifocal forms that slavery and plantation organization had fostered.

Education was considered by the planters to be subversive to both slavery and the plantation system. The most enlightened slave owners had allowed some missionaries to teach the rudiments of reading to a few slaves, but this was as far as education went. It is not unfair to say that schooling for slaves and their children was non-existent during slavery. Those who learned to read, and count had done so largely on their own account and through self-instruction.

The establishment of schools for the children of former slaves coupled with the opportunities for the most successful students to become teachers, represented a qualitative difference with what existed during slavery. The inauguration of schooling further represented the intention to break with the past. The school was the symbol of hope and the means of achieving a different future than that promised by agricultural labour on the plantation.

From several perspectives the small farm was probably the greatest symbol of freedom. It provided an alternative livelihood to the plantation. It made the owner independent of the planter. It transformed the ex-slave into an owner, instead of being owned. Farms of a certain size qualified the farmers to vote. This made him a citizen. For all of these reasons the small holding was freedom itself.

The church was the trade union, the political party, the citizen's association and the commodity organization. The church was the very centre of community life and of socioeconomic survival. In addition, it provided spiritual sustenance and moral guidance. In the free village, the church could operate in ways that would never have been tolerated on the plantation.

Through the family, the school, the church and on the farm, patriarchal authority and patterns were re-established with full theological backing. Marriage was re-established as the norm for family life. Husbands/fathers were breadwinners and mothers were housewives caring for husbands and children. Men operated in the public sphere at the same time that women were returned to the private sphere. Teachers were men. So too were the leaders of the church. While the farm required the assistance of all members of the family, the fathers were in charge. Slavery had undermined patriarchy. The free villagers purposed to restore it.

The free villages, based on family, school, farm and church, was part of a single movement: that of affirming the personhood of blacks and their establishment as citizens of the colonial state. It was a movement of the blacks themselves, supported by the non-conformist denominations, particularly the Baptists. It was opposed by the planters, but its power was greater than the opposition. The communities established were consistent with both the values of the people of African ancestry and the orthodoxy of the churches which supported them. The greatest divergence was in the extent to which the Africans accepted the doctrines of the church compared to their ancestral religious practices.

## **THE COLONIAL STATE AND EDUCATION OF PEASANTS.**

In examining the Colonial State and the education of peasants it is necessary for sake of convenience to look at three periods: 1834 to 1865, 1866 to 1899 and 1900 to 1962. The State behaved differently in each period.

### **The Delinquent Colonial State: 1834 to 1865**

The franchise to develop an education system for blacks after emancipation was not given to the planter-controlled state apparatus. The Imperial government gave the franchise to the churches. The hostility and distrust between former slave owner and former slave did not provide the basis for cooperative endeavours. Church control meant some degree of people control, not only by virtue of being paying clients of the schools created, but more importantly through membership in the church. Control of schooling therefore rested with the ex-slaves and their allies in the denominations.

The planters' view of schooling, if it had to be offered, was that it should make the children of the ex-slaves willing workers on the plantation: schooling should produce labourers, domestics and artisans. As such, it should consist of basic reading, counting and vocational skills. This view was in total conflict with that of the slaves. Plantation work was what was left when all else had failed. Education was the promise and possibility of a better life. As such, it should be the same as the planters provided for their children. Schooling should provide good liberal education that could lead to upward social mobility. Because of their control of schooling, the ex-slaves and their allies established the school system consistent with their views.

After the Imperial grant for education came to an end in 1846, the Imperial government invited the Assembly to undertake their role in the financing of elementary education. The meagre resources allocated in response to this invitation could be construed as polite decline of such a role. The planter controlled colonial state believed that by withholding financial support, they would undermine mass education and the mobility it could possibly offer the peasants, who were its chief consumers.

The planter controlled state proved right in that assessment but did not foresee its consequence. John Savage, who was a teacher and Inspector of schools during the period, noted that following emancipation and the establishment of the elementary school system and teachers' colleges, there were great expectations of significant material progress through education. Those hopes were dashed after 1846. Schools were closed. Enrollment declined, and attendance fell. Expectations gave way to frustration. Frustration vented its spleen in the Morant Bay rebellion in 1865.

### **The Benevolent Colonial State: 1866 - 1899**

The Morant Bay rebellion had a positive impact on the provision of education for the black population including peasants. In the 19th century the fear was that British West Indies could become another Haiti. Morant Bay rattled the British administrators because it gave a signal that fear could be transformed into reality. The provision of good quality primary education was conceived as one way of ameliorating black discontentment not only in Jamaica but throughout the Caribbean. The most fundamental change that occurred was the opening of the treasury of the colony to public primary and teacher education.

The planter-controlled Assembly had always adopted a parsimonious approach to schooling for the masses. Such grants as were made were little more than token allocations. Crown colony government changed that. Public funding for public primary education in 1868 was offered in the forms listed below:

1. Matching grants to denominations for the establishment of new schools.
2. Salary subsidy to teachers through payment by results obtained in annual examinations.
3. Annual government inspection of schools in order to ensure the quality of education being delivered.

4. Assistance with the operational expenses of the schools through a management grant and a capitulation grant based on average attendance.
5. Increased assistance to teacher training colleges to allow them to increase their annual intake of students.
6. The establishment of a Government Training college.
7. A needlework grant of three shillings for each girl in attendance at the needlework class.
8. Special grants for schools devoting three hours a day to agricultural or industrial instruction plus exemption from having to charge school fees.
9. The grading of schools according to the level of student performance and other criteria.

In addition to these provisions to schools and colleges, the Department of education was reorganized and expanded to be better able to manage and monitor the new systems that were being inaugurated.

These reforms are important from several different perspectives. First, they sought to balance the interests of different sections of the community. Those who were the main consumers of public primary schooling had always complained of the neglect of the state, inadequate numbers of schools, inadequate funds to operate the schools, insufficient trained teachers, the lack of monitoring the quality of instruction, poorly paid teachers and poor-quality education. The policy measures introduced addressed all these issues.

Second, the planting interest and ruling elite while conceding that primary education should be offered to the masses, had always maintained that primary education should be about literacy, numeracy and vocational skills related to agriculture. These policy measures not only accepted the planter's position but offered special financial incentives to induce the wide acceptance of that position. Schools offering three hours a day of agriculture and vocational skills training would benefit from free education.

These reforms rekindled great energy and activity in the primary school system. More Schools were built. The number of schools in the primary system increased from 286 schools in 1868 to 486 schools by 1872. Enrollment in the system increased dramatically. More Teachers were trained. The quality of education began to show signs of improvement in terms of the grading of schools in higher categories from year to year. All told the primary school system was again on the move out from the doldrums into which it had fallen between 1846 and the Morant Bay rebellion in 1865.

Attention must be drawn to one aspect of the reforms of 1868 that was not successfully implemented at that time. John Savage, Director of Education, charged with conceiving and implementing the reforms in reviewing their accomplishment 10 years later, noted that the special incentive scheme for schools to teach agriculture and artisan trades had to be abandoned because of strong resistance from parents despite the offer of free education. Not even by the offer of free education could the state or the planters get peasants to voluntarily accept that education should prepare their children for estate work. This was the only aspect of the 1868 reforms of education that failed.

### **The Re-aligned Colonial State: 1900 – 1962**

Crown Colony government, established in 1866, at first gave the impression that it was aligned in favour of the mass of the population. The issues it addressed were typical peasant grievances. By the end of the 19th century even the appearance had evaporated. The colonial state was clearly re-aligned with planter interests. A detailed treatment of the factors which contributed to this realignment is beyond the scope of this paper. A mere listing of them will have to suffice. These included:

- A change in the posture of the Imperial Government towards the "darker races" of the empire and the lower classes in Britain itself.
- The conclusion of the Imperial government that the future of the Caribbean colonies rested with agriculture generally and sugar in particular.
- The need to ensure that produce companies invited to set up operations in Jamaica had an adequate labour force.
- The upward mobility of some sons of the peasantry into the professions and various other occupations that blacks were not expected to pursue. This coupled with the practice of successful black men marrying women of lighter colour was frowned upon.
- The emigration of agricultural labourers and peasants to Central America, mainly Panama, many of whom returned with cash to purchase land and thus join the ranks of peasants or increase their land holdings.
- The movement of peasants into export agriculture mainly through the development of the banana industry.
- The formation of the Jamaica Union of Teachers at a time when trade unions were illegal. This threatened the possibility of a militant group of educated black men organizing in opposition to state power.

This change in alignment of the state, coincided with the acquisition of control of the educational system by the state from the churches through the introduction of free elementary education enacted in 1892. For the first time the state and the planting interest had it within their power to impose their policies on the educational system. In 1899 the education system was reformed to reflect those views.

The elements of the reform could be summarized briefly as follows:

1. The reduction in the total number of schools by closing small denominational schools where several existed in a particular area and replacing them with a single government school allegedly in close proximity. Over 200 denominational schools were closed.
2. Reducing the number of academic subjects on the curriculum and revising the content of those that remained.
3. Vocationalising the curriculum by introducing agriculture and manual training for boys and domestic economy and cooking for girls as essential subjects in primary education.
4. The reform of the teachers' college curriculum so that it was consistent with the curriculum of primary schooling.
5. Closing all the colleges training male teachers except Mico and expanding the three colleges training female teachers.
6. The introduction of employment policies which favoured the employment of women as teachers. To induce women to become primary school teachers they were offered the same salaries as men.
7. Restricting the annual expenditure on education from the public purse to no more than 10 per cent of total government expenditure.
8. Closing the university college that was attached to Jamaica College.

These reforms of primary schooling in 1900 remained in force for the entire first half on the 20th century. They only began to be changed in the period immediately prior to independence. Very few schools were built, in fact, there were more schools in the primary system in 1900 than in 1950. The primary curriculum remained focused on literacy, numeracy and vocational skills.

## **CHANGES IN THE CHURCH'S EDUCATIONAL EFFORTS.**

At the end of the 19th century it was not only the Colonial State that was changing its alignment, so too were the churches. In 1892 they handed over control of and financial responsibility for the elementary school system to the State. While they retained the day to day management of the schools, final authority rested with the State which now financed the system of free elementary education.

The Moravians and the Baptists closed teachers' colleges when government withdrew its grants to these institutions. But the withdrawal of government grants by itself cannot explain the closure of these colleges. The Baptists had a history of operating educational institutions without government support. The denominations must have had their own reasons for the closure. It could be argued that they maintained these colleges only to provide teachers for their schools. Having handed over the elementary schools to the state they felt they had no further need to maintain these colleges. By closing their colleges, they were asserting that the government should take over the responsibility for teacher training also. But the Moravians continued to operate Bethlehem - which trained female teachers.

At this same time the Methodists closed York Castle, its high school for boys. The reason given was financial. What is interesting is that this school served mainly boys of modest means, including many sons of the peasantry. The social status of the boys of this school was on average considerably lower than the boys of Jamaica College, Munro or Wolmers. Yet between 1881, when the Jamaica Scholarship was established, and 1899 when the school was closed, boys from York Castle had won that prestigious scholarship more times than all the other schools combined. It has also won the McGilchrist scholarship for the highest performance in the West Indies. The closure of York Castle has never been satisfactorily explained.

What is not in dispute is that by the end of the 19th century many of the locally trained "native" ministers, who were proudly displayed at an earlier stage, had begun to challenge the expatriate missionaries on matters of policy and governance in the denominations. They were often supported by the lay-preacher/catechist teachers, from which ranks many of the local clergy had come. These local ministers and teachers no longer acted as ornaments of missionary benevolence, but challengers of missionary hegemony over the work of the denominations in their native land.

The denominations were also having trouble with the teachers, who were overwhelmingly male. The Code of Regulations of the Education Act of 1892 allowed Ministers, who were managers, to fire teachers for matters unrelated to school work. The bone of contention was church work. The teachers were insisting that in a State system of education the Managers should not have the power to fire them for not doing or refusing to do church work. From the church's perspective this was ungrateful, because most of these men had been trained as teachers by the church.

These successful sons of peasantry were rocking the denominational boats. They were challenging missionary leadership in the denominations and subsidizing church work through the schools. These men could no longer be regarded as trophies of missionary zeal but rather as thorns in the flesh of their former mentors. By retreating from teachers training for men and reducing theological training, the missionaries were probably seeking to reduce their torment.

## **EDUCATION AND THE MOBILITY OF CHILDREN OF PEASANTS**

The initial path of upward social mobility that was established was through the elementary school leading to the pupil-teacher status for the most able students. Some pupil-teachers through competitive examinations were selected for training as teachers and after graduation from teachers' college obtained post as teachers in schools. Because most schools were single teacher operations the teacher was in charge of the school with the assistance of some pupil teachers. Because the schools were operated by the church, and was located in a village, the teacher invariably doubled as catechist or lay-preacher or deacon depending of the terminology of the denomination. Using their teachers' certificate several were selected for theological training and became clergymen.

Although this mobility path was established in the post-emancipation period, because of the size of the school system, it was exceedingly narrow. Few were able to traverse it. After 1866 the path widened considerably principally because of the expansion of the teaching service, the creation of a police force, a nursing service and a public health service. The teaching service expanded from less than 300 in 1866 to over 1100 in 1900. These occupations created the nucleus of a small black middle class. Most of its earliest recruits were children of the peasantry.

It was the elementary school teachers who were the backbone of this emerging black middle class. Not only was they part of the class itself, but they provided the launching pad from which many moved into more traditional middle-class occupations. By 1900 many had risen from its ranks to become clergymen, barristers, doctors, tutors in teachers' colleges and civil servants. Their passage into the civil service, however, was blocked by legislation which made them ineligible to sit the civil service examinations unless they had repaid the cost of their training as teachers.

### **Change in the Gender of the Upwardly Mobile**

From the post-emancipation period upward mobility opportunities from the peasantry went to their sons. In the denominational elementary schools, teaching was a male occupation. By 1865 elementary school teaching had been established as an occupation for black men. The expansion of the school system after 1866 simply expanded the opportunities open to black men. So too did the police force. Very little opportunities were often to black women. Very few nurses were black, and this was the only occupation potentially open to peasants that was female in its composition.

Miller (1986) recorded the change in the gender composition of elementary school teachers which resulted from the decisions in 1899 to close all the colleges training male teachers, except Mico, and to implement policies that encouraged the training and employment of women as teachers. This change in the gender of elementary school teachers was the direct result of state policy. But it is also important to note that the most of denominations that retreated from elementary and teacher education for men in the last decade of the 19th century, moved to provide secondary schools especially for girls. The Anglican were the first to close its teacher training college, and the first to shift to secondary school for girls by establishing the Deaconess Home schools. These schools were established as part of the private secondary system because it was not until 1920 that church schools became part of the public secondary system.

The significance of these developments is that at the turn of the 20th century both the Colonial State and the churches had combined to implement policies and programmes that would give education leading to upward social mobility

more to the daughters of the peasantry rather than their sons. The impact of the action of the state was more immediate. That of the churches was more long-term. Both were in the same direction and reinforcing of each other.

Bearing in mind the central importance of teachers' college education, at that time, to the upward mobility of the peasantry, a shift in the gender composition of opportunities for mobility could be expected to have considerable impact on elementary schooling, and it did. The nature of the impact is seen by looking at enrollment and achievement prior to and following the changes in policy at the turn of the century. Table 1 shows the gender of children enrolled in elementary schools between 1894 and 1920.

Table 1

Elementary School Enrollment by Gender: 1894 to 1920

Year	Boys	Girls	Total
1894-1895	53,177	50,972	104,149
1899-1900	49,687	48,711	98,598
1904-1905	42,087	41,907	83,994
1909-1910	45,065	45,077	90,142
1914-1915	47,787	48,368	94,955
1919-1920	42,952	47,184	90,136

Source: Compiled from Blue Books 1894 to 1920.

Table 1 shows a decline in elementary school enrollment between 1894 and 1920. Clearly the reforms which vocationalized elementary schooling and closed small schools had a negative effect on overall participation in the school system. In 1894-95 elementary school enrollment displayed a male bias. By 1919-1920 this had been reversed to a female bias. It should be noted that the Jamaican population over the last 100 or more years, like most other populations in the Caribbean, has slightly more boys than girls in the age group from birth to 14 years. The clear implications are that while elementary school enrollment declined generally the decline was most marked among boys.

The shift in the participation of boys and girls in the elementary school system is more fully understood when the Census of 1943 is analysed in terms of the gender of persons over 10 years old who never attended school.

Table 2

## Persons with No Schooling in the Population over 10 years: 1943

Age	Male		Female		Total	
	N	%	N	%		
10 - 14	12,545	62.2	7,630	37.8	20,175	
15 - 19	11,145	61.1	7,109	38.9	18,254	
20 - 24	11,797	55.1	9,618	44.8	21,415	
25 - 29	12,627	54.4	10,590	45.6	23,217	
30 - 34	13,169	55.3	10,645	44.7	23,812	
35 - 39	12,394	54.5	10,267	45.5	22,661	
40 - 44	11,383	54.6	9,470	45.4	20,853	
45 - 49	8,204	53.0	7,289	47.0	15,493	
50 - 54	6,733	49.5	6,881	50.5	13,614	
55 - 59	4,423	47.2	4,943	52.8	9,366	
60 - 64	4,447	45.0	5,444	55.0	9,891	
65 - 69	2,368	32.3	4,952	67.7	7,320	
70 & over	4,952	36.4	8,648	63.6	13,600	

Source: Compiled from the Census 1943.

Bearing in mind that the age of entry to elementary school was seven years up to 1964, then it can be seen from Table 2 that among the age groups eligible to entry school before the turn of the century, it was more females than males who never attended school. For those eligible to enter school during the 20th century, the reverse was true, it was more males than females that never attended school.

The Census data of 1943 corroborates the school enrollment data that after 1900 there was a significant fall off in school attendance of boys. Declining upward social mobility opportunities through the school system seem to have led to the decline of the participation of boys in the school system.

Literacy in the general population is a general index of achievement at the elementary level of the educational system. While the census data did not record literacy by gender before 1911, all the reports of educators and other observers in the 19th century concurred on the observation that men were more literate than women. This is a worldwide pattern up to the present time. Table 3 shows literacy rates as reported by the censuses between 1911 and 1943.

Table 3

Literacy Levels of Jamaican Men and Women: 1911 - 1943

Year	Men	Women	Overall
1911	65.9	64.5	65.2
1921	65.1	67.3	66.3
1943	73.4	78.6	76.1

Source: Compiled from the Censuses 1911, 1921 and 1943.

Table 3 shows that in 1911 men were more literate than women. By 1921 the situation had been reversed. More women were literate than men. By 1943 the gap had widened. Literacy levels in the general population had followed the same pattern as school enrollment and attendance.

Table 4 shows illiteracy levels among the population seven years and older by race and gender in 1943.

Table 4

Illiteracy rates of Males and Females Seven Years and Older: 1943

Race/Colour	Male	Female
All Races	28.4	23.0
Blacks	31.0	25.4
Coloureds	16.2	11.9
Chinese	14.6	13.0
Whites	3.4	4.1
Indians	45.3	51.9
Syrians	4.9	6.7

Source: Compiled from the Census 1943.

Table 4 shows that among blacks and coloureds there were distinctly more men being illiterate than women. Among Chinese there were slightly more men being illiterate than females. Among whites, East Indians and Syrians there were more women illiterate than men. That is, the traditional pattern of more women being illiterate than men was observed among whites, Indians and Syrians. The new pattern of more men being illiterate than women was observed among blacks, coloureds and Chinese. The female bias was most marked among the blacks and coloureds.

To interpret the data in Table 4 it is important to note the different schools that children of different races typically attended. Blacks and Browns were the major clients of the elementary schools although Browns living in urban centers and possessing the means sent their children to prep schools. During this period significant numbers of Chinese children attended elementary schools. White and Syrian children typically attended prep schools. The vast majority of Indians children at that time remained outside of the school system, public and private.

What Table 4 shows is that among Whites and Syrians that typically patronized prep schools and Indians that typically remained outside of the public school system, the traditional pattern of men being more literate than women prevailed. However, among those racial groups that typically patronized the public elementary schools - Blacks, Coloureds and Chinese - it was more women who were literate than men. Interesting, after the Indians began to participate in the elementary school system the traditional pattern among this group was also reversed.

While the church and the state, in different ways, by 1900 had embarked on educational and other programmes which reversed the gender patterns of upward social mobility open to the children of the peasantry, by the 1940s it would appear that the socialization patterns of both home and school were consistent with the gender structure of the mobility offered. Parents doing the own private rate of return analyses invested more in their daughters who were more likely to get the opportunities available than their sons. Elementary school teachers doing similar analyses invested their efforts in the female rather than their male students. The gender bias of the structure of opportunity, the socialization of home and school and educational achievement were all in the same direction and apparently mutually reinforcing.

The gender patterns set in the first half of the 20th century has not been reversed in the latter half of the century. Both Gordon (1987) and Miller (1990) have found that in the post-war period the daughters of the peasantry have

experienced more upward social mobility than its sons. The latter are much more likely to inherit their parents' socioeconomic status than their sisters. While the sons are more likely to be peasant/agricultural labourers their sisters with superior educational achievements are more likely to join the urban drift and find employment in white collar occupations.

## **CONCLUDING DISCUSSION**

The case of education and social mobility among Jamaican peasants has implications for some of the most seminal debates that have taken place about blacks in the New World in general and the Caribbean in particular. In a paper of this length only brief reference can be made to each debate.

In the late 1930s and early 1940s, there was a big debate as to whether what had come to be known as the New World Negro family was the product of slavery or survivals of their Africa ancestry that were modified by slavery. The main combatants were E. Franklin Frazier, "The Negro Family in the United States", and Melville J. Herskovits, "The Myth of the Negro Past".

This debate did not take account of the case of the Jamaican peasants who after slavery successfully established families, villages, schools and churches which conformed to traditional patriarchal norms inside and outside of households. The African survival was the extended families based on patriarchy that the peasants re-established in the post-emancipation period. This point was missed in the debate. The case of the Jamaican peasants undermines Herskovits argument that the matrifocal forms were African survivals.

Yet the case of the Jamaican peasants does not entirely support Frazier argument that matrifocal forms were the legacy of slavery. Certainly, it first emerged in slavery and re-emerged among the descendants of slaves who had re-established patriarchal family forms in the post emancipation period. Clarke (1957) in her comparison of family patterns in a peasant village and an estate town, found matrifocal households in both communities and almost to the same extent. The peasant experience points to the re-emergence of the matrifocal forms observed during slavery among

the very group who, after emancipation, consciously and deliberately abandoned that form. In the circumstances it is doubtful whether it is accurate to regard the matrifocal family as a social legacy of slavery.

The next seminal debate was that between the Smiths - Raymond T. and M. G. - which focused on virtues and flaws of cultural pluralism as a conceptual tool for understanding Caribbean societies. Raymond T. Smith in his book "The Negro Family in British Guiana" stated from his study, in the early 1950s, that children derived very little if anything from their fathers who were marginal and ineffective even when they were resident in the household. He maintained that most Negro lower class households were dominated by women whose influence grew as the children got older. He maintained that the matrifocality of household organization and its flip side male marginality, as husbands and fathers, were directly related to low rates of social mobility, restricted public roles, limited political responsibilities, low social status and limited managerial functions of adult negro males in Guyanese society.

M. G. Smith took issue with his namesake's sweeping characterization of black lower-class households in the Caribbean. He correctly pointed out that no other researcher, conducting studies in the region, had found black lower-class men to be universally marginal as husbands and fathers. Further, he cited studies, including that of Clarke's, which provided empirical evidence of black lower-class men who continued to operate along traditional patriarchal lines in the households in which they lived.

Clarke insisted that the important point for understanding the situation was conditions that make it impossible for men to perform the roles of father and husbands, as these roles are defined in society, persist in present-day Caribbean societies. M. G. Smith hypothesized that the structure of Caribbean Creole society and culture is sufficiently similar to that of the slave period for many old customs to retain functional value.

This debate, which was largely between sociologists and anthropologists, was inconclusive. While it was possible to verify empirically many of the patterns described by all the participants, there was no closure on how best to explain them or what accounted for their persistence.

It is here that the contribution of the New World Group in general, and the brilliant work of Professor George Beckford in particular, in his book " Persistent Poverty" threw light on why certain patterns persisted in Caribbean society. Beckford showed that from the very outset after emancipation, peasant production had to compete with plantation production on terms that were biased in favour of the plantation with respect to land, labour, markets and capital. Beckford concluded that in the peasant/plantation conflict, peasant development was constrained by the institutional legacy of the plantation system. He further observed that so long as resources in Jamaica, and the Caribbean, remain scarce peasants are unlikely to secure a sufficient base for the expansion of production and advancement of their levels of living.

It is clear that the peasants, from very early, had come to the same conclusion as Professor Beckford. While peasant production may not advance their levels of living because the constraints of the plantation system, such advancement could come through the educational system by way of upward social mobility. The education system, and social mobility through successful participation, was the escape hatch in the conflict with the plantation. It is through this route that peasants strove to circumvent the trap of persistent poverty.

The case of education and social mobility among Jamaican peasants proposes an intriguing hypothesis. Stated briefly it is that where groups in society are contending and where the channel of upward social mobility through education of the subordinate group comes under the control of the dominant group, the latter shifts the gender structure of opportunity in favour of the females of the subordinate group, thus creating matrifocal forms in the former. In these circumstances it will be the females of the subordinate group that are allowed to escape persistent poverty and its males who are trapped by it. The process is not limited to any specific context. Hence, the matrifocal forms that are created are not limited to any particular historical circumstance or period or group.

The case of the Jamaican peasant can be described as follows: Fired with zeal to reverse the patterns of slavery and supported by the patriarchal theology of the church, peasants established communities that reinstated patriarchal traditions in the family, school and work place. Accordingly, men headed families. Educational and employment opportunities went to boys. Men enjoyed whatever upward social mobility opportunities that were available. It was

therefore the sons of the peasantry that advanced socially and economically. For as long as the peasants maintained some control of educational and employment opportunities these patterns prevailed.

Once the control of educational and employment opportunities was handed over to the planter-controlled State, the gender structure of opportunities was reversed. It was the daughters of the peasantry that now enjoyed the lion share of opportunities that once went to their brothers. One hundred years after the emancipation of slavery the matrifocal forms that had come to characterize the black family during slavery, had been re-established in the very group that had offered the greatest resistance. Implicitly they had helped to do it to themselves by accepting the terms of social advancement offered by the dominant group through the State, which the latter controlled.