

KS3 History

Lesson 1 of an enquiry of 4 lessons

Jamaica: Enslaved people and resistance

Enquiry: How successful were efforts to abolish slavery in the nineteenth century?

Mr Madeley



Jamaica: Brief history of enslavement

The Caribbean island of Jamaica was first **colonised** by the Spanish. They brought enslaved West African people to the island in order to work on the land. West African people were enslaved and forced to travel across the Atlantic after a collapse in the population of the local Taíno peoples. A combination of European diseases and being forced to work caused many to die.

In 1655, the British attacked Jamaica and captured it. Many of the enslaved West African people under Spanish rule were released by the Spanish. However, the British wanted to take over Jamaica as a slave colony. So, the British re-established slavery in Jamaica. The legal use of enslaved people continued under the British until 1834.



Who owned enslaved people in Jamaica?

In order to re-establish slavery in Jamaica the trade in enslaved people continued under the British. In total, it is estimated that around one million enslaved people were transported to Jamaica from West Africa. The majority of those enslaved people would be owned by white Europeans. The British forced the enslaved people to work mainly on the sugar **plantations** in difficult conditions. Both the enslaved people and the plantations were seen as property of the Europeans. On rare occasions, some white plantation owners would leave, in their **will**, some of their enslaved people to their enslaved mistresses or their children. Their mistresses would be freed so that they could inherit their new possessions. So there was a small number of mixed-race slave owners living in Jamaica.



Maroons

After the British took control of Jamaica, they fought to re-establish slavery. Many of the formerly enslaved people who had been freed by the Spanish, resisted British attempts to re-establish slavery. These people became known as the **maroons** and lived in the mountainous area of Jamaica.

The British fought a number of wars against the Maroons. During these conflicts, the maroons fought with skill and bravery. In the first war the British realised they could not defeat the maroons and signed a **treaty**. The treaty recognised the freedom of the maroons in return for them agreeing to support the British in returning runaway slaves to plantations. After a second war with the Maroons, some Maroons were **deported** and forced to leave Jamaica for Freetown in Sierra Leone on the West African coast.



What resistance was there to enslavement in Jamaica?

The maroon wars were not the only way that enslaved and formerly enslaved people resisted slavery. There were several rebellions which started in plantations. For example, in 1760 the Tacky Revolt took place where enslaved people rebelled against the horrendous conditions on plantations. Then in 1831, the Baptist War took place. Here so many enslaved people rose up against their owners that it shook Jamaica to the foundation.

There were also smaller acts of rebellion that enslaved people did in order to resist slavery. These include refusals to work and destruction of crops. All these forms of resistance increased pressure on the British government to carry out **abolition** of slavery in the **British Empire**.



Glossary

Colonised - When one country conquers another and then begins to settle on it.

Plantations - A large farm where enslaved people worked.

Settlements - Another word for where people live, such as towns or villages.

Deported - To be removed from where you live and moved to another country.

Will - A legal document that tells your relatives what happens to your possessions when you die.

Abolition - The ending of something.

British Empire - Land owned by Britain around the world



Comprehension Questions

1. Who were the original owners of enslaved people in Jamaica?
2. Who were the Maroons?
3. How many enslaved people are estimated to have been transported to Jamaica?
4. What crop did the majority of enslaved people collect?
5. What resistance did the British face in Jamaica?

Extension Question

Why did the Spanish and British begin using enslaved people in Jamaica?

