



5-2016

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## Recommended Citation

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**The Political Illegitimacy of “Superstition”**  
*Obeah after the Morant Bay Rebellion, 1865-1900*

Rachael MacLean

April 26, 2016

## Introduction

For many British Imperialists, the Jamaican Morant Bay Rebellion of 1865 signified the failure of the “Mighty Experiment” of emancipation, begun merely 30 years earlier.<sup>1</sup> Sparked by the unjust detention of a poor black man for trespassing on a long-abandoned plantation, this rebellion began on 7 October 1865. On that day, black protestors sought to peacefully disrupt the trial in Morant Bay, a coastal town in southeastern Jamaica. When police attempted to arrest protestors, including Baptist preacher Paul Bogle, responses grew violent. On 11 October, Bogle led a new group of armed protestors to Morant Bay and clashed with a hastily-formed militia. This initial clash killed seven protestors whose compatriots set the courthouse, filled with militia members, ablaze.<sup>2</sup> The subsequent repression of the rebellion by Brigadier-General Nelson was brutal and indiscriminate. Seven hundred and ninety three black Jamaicans were killed, either directly by soldiers or later, by hanging without proper trial. Even prominent politician George William Gordon was executed for merely encouraging Paul Bogle to make his grievances known.<sup>3</sup> The excessive force of this repression led to the recall of Edward John Eyre, the Governor of Jamaica, as well as the liquidation of the Jamaican House of Assembly, ridding Jamaica of its representative government.<sup>4</sup> In addition, the violence of the rebellion itself, led by poor black Jamaicans protesting the continued domination of white planters, signified to many

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<sup>1</sup> Diana Paton, “Obeah in the post-emancipation era,” *The Cultural Politics of Obeah* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015): 120.

<sup>2</sup> Jake Cavanaugh, “The Cause of the Morant Bay Rebellion: 1865,” *University of Miami Digital Collections* (University of Miami) Accessed 2 Dec. 2015.

<sup>3</sup> Gad J. Heuman, *The Killing Time: The Morant Bay Rebellion in Jamaica* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1994.)

<sup>4</sup> Kenneth Bilby, “Image and Imagination: *Re-visioning the Maroons in the Morant Bay Rebellion*,” *History and Memory* 24 (2) Indiana University Press, 2012: 41–72.

colonists the hostility and uncivilized nature of people of color. To them, this rebellion signaled the unreadiness or inability of people of color to govern themselves.<sup>5</sup>

As a result of this rebellion, the British West Indies (with the exception of Barbados) were put under crown colony rule and stripped of their representative governments.<sup>6</sup> Implicit in subsequent debates regarding this decision was the assumption that West Indians, especially West Indians of color, only deserved self-governance to the extent that they were “modern” and “civilized.” Civilized, in the British vernacular of the late nineteenth century meant to adhere to enlightenment conceptions of rationality, to be Christian, and to be cooperative with the west. To be uncivilized, on the other hand, was to be superstitious, barbarous, and non-European, especially African. Enforcing these concepts was incredibly important to the British mission of not only political but also cultural and religious hegemony.<sup>7</sup> After Morant Bay, the impetus was put on West Indians to prove their readiness for representative government by adhering to this narrow definition of civilization. Debates over whether the West Indies were ready for representative government reached an especially feverish pitch after 1884, which marked the initial return of local autonomy to some West Indian colonies, particularly Jamaica.

Especially important to imperialists after Morant Bay was the ability of West Indians to adhere to appropriate religious and anti-superstitious mindsets. The main sticking point of this debate was Obeah, an African-derived spiritual practice. Obeah has proved notoriously hard to specifically define for even the most analytically gifted scholars. There is no clear liturgical or even legal consensus of what Obeah is. The lack of liturgical consistency is in large part because

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<sup>5</sup> "Morant Bay Rebellion." *Africana: The Encyclopedia of the African and African American Experience, Second Edition*, 2005.

<sup>6</sup> Paton, "Obeah in the post-emancipation era," 129.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 157; Abdul R. JanMohamed, "The Economy of Manichean Allegory: The Function of Racial Difference in Colonialist Literature," *Critical Inquiry* 12.1 (1985): 59–87.

of Obeah's long illegalization, making it risky for Obeah practitioners to write their knowledge and traditions down, and making it more likely that their possessions would be destroyed after their deaths.<sup>8</sup> In addition, this prohibition often forced Obeah practitioners to work on a discreet one-on-one basis with their clients, making it difficult to form a community of believers. Many African and African-derived religious traditions were also meant to be passed down orally only to trained adepts, so even if Obeah practitioners could read and write, they may have chosen not to write their traditions down. Thus, the specific practices of Obeah may have been intentionally hidden from religious outsiders.<sup>9</sup>

As for shaky legal definitions, many have argued that laws were kept deliberately vague. By avoiding specificity, lawmakers could better persecute those who they saw disrupting civilization with African-derived practices.<sup>10</sup> Thus, whether a person was practicing Obeah or a different African spiritual tradition, such as *Vodou* or *Myal*, it could be called Obeah by law. Then, the practitioner could be jailed, whipped, or subject to steep fines.<sup>11</sup> In fact, it is possible that Obeah was a term made important by lawmakers themselves rather than by practitioners of African traditions.<sup>12</sup>

In addition to this inability to clearly define Obeah, this spirituality does not appear to refer to a hierarchically organized religion. Rather, it refers to a collection of African-derived spiritual beliefs, which can be practiced on their own or even incorporated into other religious

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<sup>8</sup> Jerome S. Handler and Kenneth M. Bilby, *Enacting Power: The Criminalization of Obeah in the Anglophone Caribbean 1760-2011* (Jamaica: University of West Indies Press, 2012): 1-2; Henry Hesketh Joudou Bell, *Obeah: Witchcraft in the West Indies*, (London: S. Low, Marston, Searle & Rivington, Limited, 1889): 15-20. See Bell's source for an account of a Catholic missionary systematically destroying the possessions of a dead Obeah practitioner.

<sup>9</sup> Margarite Fernandez Olmos and Lizabeth Paravisini-Gebert, "Obeah, Myal, and Quimbois," *Creole Religions of the Caribbean: An Introduction From Vodou and Santeria to Obeah and Espiritismo*, 2nd ed. (New York, NY: New York University Press, 2011): 158-159.

<sup>10</sup> Handler and Bilby, *Enacting Power*, 2-3.

<sup>11</sup> Paton, "Obeah in the Post-Emancipation Era," 121-124.

<sup>12</sup> Handler and Bilby, *Enacting Power*, 5.

traditions. Indeed, one scholar has argued that a central feature of African-derived religions and spiritualities is their ability to seamlessly incorporate newly encountered divine figures and rituals into preexisting practices.<sup>13</sup> What is clear is that Obeah can be used for harm or healing, uses ritual objects and actions, is involved with the relationship between humans and supernatural spirits, and has long been identified with witchcraft, poisoning, evil, and superstition.<sup>14</sup> Healing, especially, appears to be a primary aspect of this tradition. Indeed, even opponents of Obeah were forced to admit that, “Obeah-men were called in to requisition during sickness in preference to, and often to the entire exclusion of the proper practitioner [i.e. a medical doctor].”<sup>15</sup> Nonetheless, for centuries this spirituality had been prohibited and associated with negative qualities. Thus, by 1865, it had become extremely politically toxic, not only to imperialists but even to opponents of colonialism. Additionally, during the late nineteenth century, arguments for or against representative government were extremely difficult to separate from arguments over the religious practices of British West Indians. In this paper, I will argue that the overwhelming majority people between 1865 and 1900 who publically argued for or against representative government in the West Indies agreed that Obeah was negative.

The first and most obvious group who politically condemned Obeah were crown rule advocates. Many British Imperialists, wanting to make a case for continued crown rule, argued that, if West Indians were left to govern themselves, they would once again become “like Africans,” accept Obeah, and engage in violence, barbarity, and even cannibalism without restraint. For this reason, they argued crown rule had to be imposed and legislation made to

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<sup>13</sup> Dianne M. Stewart, “Whispers of Obeah and the Intellectual Habit of *Listening*” (presentation, National Conference for Undergraduate Research, Asheville, NC, April 7-9, 2016).

<sup>14</sup> Olmos and Paravisini-Gebert, “Obeah, Myal, and Quimbois,” 155, 170.

<sup>15</sup> “Recollection of a West Indian Photographer; Being Sketches of Character and Anecdotes in Connection with the Business during Twelve Years' Experience,” *The Barbados Agricultural Reporter* (Bridgetown: 16 Feb. 1872): 3. *America's Historical Newspapers*, Accessed 24 Apr. 2016.

suppress “superstitious and barbarous” practices.<sup>16</sup> Diana Paton has paid close attention to the historical significance of this argument in her recent book *The Cultural Politics of Obeah*. She has especially analyzed James Anthony Froude’s 1888 book *The English in the West Indies*. This book argued against West Indian representative government in large part by arguing that the religious practices of West Indies had not yet progressed enough to allow for self-rule.<sup>17</sup> Froude was a famous English historian, biographer, and travel writer with influence over the British academic world. Although his polemical writing style may have increasingly diminished his reputation in scholarly circles throughout his career, he nonetheless garnered a large popular following to make up for it. This was especially true after the publication of his 1886 travel narrative *Oceana*, which sold over 100,000 copies in the first nine months, and after which he closely modeled *The English in the West Indies*.<sup>18</sup> In addition, Froude was a famous opponent of British Catholic revivals, placing emphasis on struggling against “forces of darkness.”<sup>19</sup> Even in his attacks against Catholicism, then, his religious use of the Manichean allegory (the moralistic pitting of dark against light) suggested the blatant racism on which he based *The English in the West Indies*. His large following and his racist arguments against West Indian representative government necessitated a response from his opponents. Paton has also examined with close attention the arguments of his 1888-1889 respondents John Jacob Thomas, Nicholas Darnell Davis, and CS Salmon, all of whom sought to disprove Froude’s claims and argue for representative government.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Paton, “Obeah in the post-emancipation era,” 138; James Anthony Froude, *The English in the West Indies: Or, The Bow of Ulysses* (London: Green and Longmans, 1888): 144.

<sup>17</sup> Paton, “Obeah in the Post-Emancipation Era,” 132-139.

<sup>18</sup> Ciaran Brady, *James Anthony Froude: An Intellectual Biography of a Victorian Prophet* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 404.

<sup>19</sup> “Froude, James Anthony,” *Britannica Online Academic Edition*, 2015.

<sup>20</sup> Paton, “Obeah in the Post-Emancipation Era,” 132-139.

Paton's research and writing about Obeah is extensive, impressively so considering the scant historiography on the topic. Nonetheless, there is significant room to build on her work. For instance, Henry Hesketh Joudou Bell's *Obeah: Witchcraft in the West Indies* deserves similar consideration to Froude and his respondents as an implicitly political text. For, although there is little direct political argument in the book, Bell's position as assistant governor of Barbados, and treasurer of Grenada during the time he wrote this book cast all of his works and arguments in a potentially political sphere.<sup>21</sup> Like Froude, Bell clearly perceived Obeah to be rampant and Obeah practitioners as morally and intellectually inferior to Christians, thus making them less appropriate candidates for self-governance.<sup>22</sup> Although Paton does mention Bell, she argues that his works did not have political implications and even casts him as an opponent of Froude's politics because of his condemnatory response to some of Froude's more racist claims. Paton even argues that his depictions of Obeah as harmless and silly, while certainly patronizing, did much to humanize Obeah practitioners, comparing them to medieval and early modern Europeans with pagan beliefs.<sup>23</sup> While Bell certainly had a less overtly racist argument than Froude and made less direct political claims, I argue that his works nonetheless had many of the same political implications and examine the similarities between Froude and Bell.

In addition, one area particularly in need of continued evaluation is the role of Obeah in West Indian counterarguments in favor of representative government. These have not been examined as closely and reveal many of the roots of why Obeah remains illegal in the postcolonial world. These arguments come in two main forms: those arguments that advocated imperial reform including representative government (including those made by Thomas, Davis,

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<sup>21</sup> Chris Alderman, "Bell, Sir Henry Hesketh Joudou (1864-1952), Colonial Governor and Author," *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford: Oxford Dictionary of National Biography, 2004).

<sup>22</sup> Bell, *Obeah*.

<sup>23</sup> Paton, "Obeah in the Post-Emancipation Era," 140-142.

and Salmon), and arguments made in a context of religious revivalism that attacked imperialism. Both forms of this argument for representative government and against crown rule ultimately condemned Obeah; however, the reasons for their condemnations were strikingly different. Imperial reform arguments mostly condemned Obeah as a superstition because of its connection with uncivilized Africa. Their strategy then, was mainly to deny the importance of Obeah to West Indian society and convince their audience that Obeah belief was on an inevitable decline into oblivion.<sup>24</sup> Their arguments thus fell within imperially defined discourses and advocated reform, not radical upheaval of imperialism. These arguments mostly came from educated, middle class West Indians across racial boundaries who stood to gain the most from a representative government that retained favorable business and political ties to Great Britain.

Arguments made in the context of religious revivalism, which combined African and Christian spiritual practices, on the other hand, condemned Obeah because of its association with evil.<sup>25</sup> By contrasting their own religious activities and morality to Obeah practitioners', they built credibility with their audience and distinguished their practices as *good* religion with African elements. While accepting, then, that Obeah practitioners were unfit for self-governance, they argued that practitioners of other African-derived spiritualities were legitimate. Indeed, most argued that the imperial system should be totally done away with in favor of an independent nation with representative government. These actors were mostly lower class black or "colored" Jamaicans who felt first-hand the continued inequality of the post-emancipation era, and thus realized the true exploitative nature of colonialism.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> John Jacob Thomas, "Religion for Negroes," *Froudacity: West India Fables by J.A. Froude Explained by J.J. Thomas* (London: T. Fisher Unwin, 1889): 207-233.

<sup>25</sup> Olmos and Paravisini-Gebert, "Obeah, Myal, and Quimbois," 171-173.

<sup>26</sup> Ken Post, *Arise Ye Starvelings: The Jamaican Labour Rebellion of 1938 and its Aftermath* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1978): 7.

Clearly, these arguments do not represent the full range of possible responses to British condemnation of Obeah and representative government. Obeah practitioners themselves and their clients, for instance, likely thought that they were fit for membership in a representative system. These practitioners and clients, however, were prevented from publically making their arguments by threat of legal retribution. In most West Indian legal codes, practicing Obeah was punishable by imprisonment and public whipping.<sup>27</sup> Likewise, Jamaica's 1898 Obeah law made even consulting with Obeah practitioners illegal.<sup>28</sup> Additionally, as politician George William Gordon's execution had proved, merely associating with a transgressive individual was extremely dangerous in the colonial West Indies. For this same reason, it is impossible to know exactly how many Obeah practitioners existed throughout the West Indies in the late nineteenth century, although contemporary accounts like Bell's *Obeah* and others suggest its practice was fairly common.<sup>29</sup> To this day, Obeah remains *de jure* illegal in Jamaica, although enforcement of Obeah laws has decreased so significantly since the mid twentieth century that it is now often practiced openly.<sup>30</sup>

Thus, political actors, for or against representative government, can be split into three basic categories concerning their stance on Obeah. Those who favored crown rule argued that Obeah was rampant in the West Indies and that it was uncivilized by virtue of being "African;" imperial reformers in favor of representation argued that Obeah belief was declining but continued to connect Obeah's negativity to its African origins; finally, religious revivalists

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<sup>27</sup> Diana Paton, "Summary Convictions Ordinance, 1868 (Trinidad)," *Obeah Histories*, 12 Nov. 2012. Accessed 02 Dec. 2015.

<sup>28</sup> Jamaica, Governor and Legislative Council of Jamaica, *The Obeah Law, 1898*, signed By A.W.L. Hemming (UK: National Archives, 1898), accessed on Diana Paton, "The Obeah Law, Jamaica, 1898," *Obeah Histories*, Accessed October, 2015.

<sup>29</sup> Bell, *Obeah*, 4-5.

<sup>30</sup> Handler and Bilby, *Enacting Power*, i-v.

sought to radically overturn imperial structures and connected Obeah's negativity to its supposedly evil content.

### **Demonization and Ridicule of Obeah**

While it may come as no surprise that crown rule advocates easily accepted that Obeah practitioners were unworthy of self-governance, the uncontroversial nature of this claim even by opponents of crown rule is remarkable. As already stated, even practitioners of syncretic and other African-derived religions in the West Indies sought to distance themselves from this politically toxic spirituality. Despite the unity of opinion surrounding the illegitimacy of Obeah, the discourse surrounding Obeah in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries was tonally conflicted. Many demonized and feared Obeah, many ridiculed it as pure superstition, and, most remarkably, many held these feelings of mockery and fear side by side. To understand, then, why no advocates of representative government argued for the political legitimacy of Obeah, it is necessary to explore how Obeah became so politically toxic and regarded with both condescension and fear.

Modern historians of the British Caribbean now widely agree that the demonization and legislation against Obeah began because of Obeah's role in slave rebellions.<sup>31</sup> The Jamaican *Act to Remedy the Evils Arising from Irregular Assemblies of Slaves*, the first law to legislate against Obeah, was passed in 1760 just after Tacky's Rebellion.<sup>32</sup> This rebellion witnessed a group of predominantly Akan-speaking slaves, led by their compatriot Tacky, storm Port Maria fort in Jamaica, seize the weapons stored there, and unite with an island-wide network of resistance.

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<sup>31</sup> Diana Paton, "Witchcraft, Poison, Law, and Atlantic Slavery," *William and Mary* 69, no. 2 (April 1, 2012): 235–64; Handler and Bilby, *Enacting Power*; Randy M. Brown, "The 'Bad Business' of Obeah: Power, Authority, and the Politics of Slave Culture in the British Caribbean," *William and Mary Quarterly* 68, no. 3 (July 2011): 451–80.

<sup>32</sup> *Act to Remedy the Evils arising from Irregular Assemblies of Slaves* (Jamaica, 1760), Accessed on Diana Paton, "An Act to Remedy the Evils arising from Irregular Assemblies of Slaves, Jamaica 1760," *Obeah Histories*, Accessed October, 2015.

Obeah practitioners supported the rebellion by giving rebels certain supernaturally endowed powders meant to make them invincible.<sup>33</sup> Thus, it was Obeah's power to inspire communities of believers to courage and revolt that made it powerful.

Even after emancipation, Obeah continued to be associated with rebellion in the popular mind. Early twentieth century Jamaican imperialist, Herbert G. De Lisser, depicted an Obeahman, Takoo, murdering a slave owner and starting a revolution in his 1929 novel *The White Witch of Rosehall*. In this way, De Lisser fictionally attributed a real 1831 rebellion with no explicit historical connection to Obeah to an Obeah practitioner.<sup>34</sup> Likewise, contemporary reporters on the Morant Bay Rebellion often attributed the rebellion to Obeah practitioners. For example, Rev. Alexander Foote, stated that "the most depraved Sabbath-breakers, drunkards, [and] Obeah-men... composed the rebel mob."<sup>35</sup> Indeed, even Governor Edward John Eyre himself argued that Mr. Gordon, the politician who had encouraged Paul Bogle to make his grievances known, was "regarded by the negroes generally throughout the island as an obeah man."<sup>36</sup> Imperialists, both those who advocated for crown rule and those who advocated for representative government within the empire thus had good reason to fear Obeah as a threat to the imperial system. Obeah's close association with rebellion against plantation owners is likely what made it such a prominent target after the Morant Bay rebellion.

This close association of Obeah with rebellion, however, does not explain why those more sympathetic to rebellious actors, especially religious revivalists, would also demonize Obeah. One reason for this hatred and fear was likely exceptional cases and popular depictions of

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<sup>33</sup> Paton, "Witchcraft, Poison, Law, and Atlantic Slavery," 256-8.

<sup>34</sup> Herbert G. De Lisser, *The White Witch of Rosehall* (London: Macmillan Education, 2007).

<sup>35</sup> Alexander Foote, "Extract of a Letter from the Rev. Alexander Foote, Date Manchioneal, Jamaica, November 7th, 1865," *St. Christopher Advertiser, and Weekly Intelligencer* (Basse-Terre, St. Christopher: 6 Feb. 1866): 2, *America's Historical Newspapers*, Accessed 23 Apr. 2016.

<sup>36</sup> Edward J. Eyre, "Jamaica," *The Saint Christopher Gazette* (Basse-Terre, St. Christopher: 31 Aug. 1866): 2, *America's Historical Newspapers*, Accessed 23 Apr. 2016.

Obeah practitioners' violence toward community members. For instance, one occurrence of the Obeah-identified Minje Mama dance on Berbice's Op Hoop van Beter plantation in 1821 ended in extreme violence. During this dance, participants became possessed by spirits in order to locate the source of a sickness that had been afflicting the plantation. In the course of this ceremony, Madalon, an old, socially isolated enslaved woman, was accused of using her spiritual powers to inflict illness on others. She was thus whipped in an attempt to purify her, but ultimately died from the beatings.<sup>37</sup> Additionally, in Jamaica, plantation owner Matthew Gregory Lewis claimed that between 1816 and 1818 a "reputed Obeah man," Adam, was "strongly suspected of having poisoned more than twelve negroes."<sup>38</sup> These instances of violent Obeah practices were much more likely to be taken to court than everyday Obeah practices like dressing crops with ritual objects to ward off thieves.<sup>39</sup> Thus, more attention was paid to violent cases of Obeah than peaceful cases, making them more likely to enter into popular imagination.

The language of legislation itself also perpetuated ideas of Obeah as an evil, harmful, or deceitful practice.<sup>40</sup> The 1898 Jamaican Obeah Law defined Obeah practitioners as "any person who, to effect any fraudulent or unlawful purpose, or for gain, or for the purpose of frightening any person, uses, or pretends to use any occult means, or pretends to possess any supernatural power or knowledge."<sup>41</sup> The negative language of "fraudulence," "for gain," and "frightening" all served to further the image of greedy, deceitful, and harmful Obeah practitioners. Thus, the

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<sup>37</sup> Brown, "The 'Bad Business' of Obeah," 451–80; Berbice was, at this time, still technically a Dutch colony. Nonetheless, it was subject to frequent occupations by neighboring British Suriname, was largely Anglophone, and would soon become British Guyana. For these reasons, I believe this instance still deserves consideration in the history of the British Caribbean.

<sup>38</sup> Matthew Gregory Lewis, *Journal of a West India Proprietor Kept During a Residence in the Island of Jamaica* (London: 1834): 137, 350.

<sup>39</sup> Paton, "Obeah in the post-emancipation era," 140.

<sup>40</sup> Handler and Bilby, *Enacting Power*, 3.

<sup>41</sup> Jamaica, *The Obeah Law, 1898*.

creation and implementation of laws against Obeah drove popular perception of Obeah as violent and evil.

Non-legal cultural productions of the nineteenth century also encouraged audiences to view Obeah as barbarous. In 1884, for instance, Spenser St John's historical and political book *Hayti, or the Black Republic* argued that Haitian *Vodou* practitioners frequently and with relative impunity engaged in cannibalism, especially child-eating. He drew this claim from an isolated Haitian legal case, the *Affaire de Bizoton* of 1864, in which four men and women were executed for kidnapping, murdering, and eating a twelve year old girl, allegedly in a *Vodou* ceremony.<sup>42</sup> Spenser St John and others like him also argued that Haitian *Vodou* was no different than Obeah. They thus believed that Obeah, too, harbored cannibalistic potential if not kept in check through legal policy and moral education.<sup>43</sup>

Considering fictional productions, the most popular Obeah figure of this time both in Britain and the West Indies was "Three Fingered Jack," a fictionalization of Jack Mansong. Mansong was likely a real historical figure who existed sometime before 1799 who escaped Jamaican slavery and led a group of maroons. Maroons were black Jamaicans who had escaped slavery and lived on the fringes of society, often in forested areas. His story first appeared in the Jamaican *Royal Gazette* in 1799 but the source of almost all of these fictionalizations was Benjamin Moseley's 1800 book *A Treatise on Sugar*, which attributed Jack's power to his use of Obi or Obeah.<sup>44</sup> Moseley breezily equated Obeah with biblical witchcraft and described Jack as "the terror of Jamaica." In his depiction, Jack wielded an Obi (used here as the term for a tool of Obeah as well as the practice itself) made of "a cat's foot, a dried toad, a pig's tail, a slip of

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<sup>42</sup> Mike Dash, "The Trial That Gave Vodou a Bad Name," *History / Smithsonian* (Smithsonian.com, 29 May 2013), Accessed 04 Apr. 2016.

<sup>43</sup> Paton, "Obeah in the Post-Emancipation Era," 128.

<sup>44</sup> Diana Paton, "Three-Fingered Jack," *Obeah Histories* (12 Nov. 2012), Accessed 18 Oct. 2015.

virginal parchment of kid's skin, with characters marked in blood on it." He also "always kill[ed] his pursuers."<sup>45</sup> In Moseley's depiction, Three-Fingered Jack's pursuers were enslaved people, recently converted to Christianity, marking him not as a rebel against the colonial or chattel slavery system, but as an outsider who inflicted violence on the community at large. This monstrous depiction of an Obeah practitioner became the source material not only for an extremely popular nineteenth century pantomime performed in Haymarket Theater in London, but literary productions, playing cards, and mass produced images.<sup>46</sup> These depictions emphasized not only Jack's brutality but his antisocial qualities. Jack is depicted fighting against a community of people of which he was once a part and spending all of his time alone. This stands in sharp contrast to his pursers who, in Moseley's depiction, eventually overcome him by working together.

Thus, it was not only the depiction of Obeah as violent that led other African-derived religious practitioners to disavow Obeah, but the depiction of Obeah as anti-communal. Obeah practitioners worked alone, and often for a fee.<sup>47</sup> Religious revivalists were often disenfranchised and poor; they thus had reason to resent the economic and exclusive practice of Obeah. Religious revivalists also carried out worship and ritual in congregational settings, one travel writer remarking on how "the negroes... thoroughly enjoy public worship."<sup>48</sup> From this vantage point, the isolation of Obeah practitioners seemed secretive and suspicious.<sup>49</sup> For all of these reasons, even religious revivalists had ample cultural evidence to consider Obeah practitioners violent, greedy outsiders.

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<sup>45</sup> Benjamin Moseley, *A Treatise on Sugar, With Miscellaneous Medical Observations*, Second Edition, with Considerable Additions (London: Printed by John Nichols, for G. G. and J. Robinson, 1800): 197-198.

<sup>46</sup> See Appendix I; Paton, "Three-Fingered Jack."

<sup>47</sup> Olmos and Paravisini-Gebert, "Obeah, Myal, and Quimbois," 173.

<sup>48</sup> Greville John Chester, "Chapter VI. Barbados," *Transatlantic Sketches in the West Indies, South America, Canada, and the United States* (London: Smith, Elder, 1869): 59-83.

<sup>49</sup> Paton, "Obeah in the Post-Emancipation Era," 152.

Finally, it was likely in the best interest of religious revivalists to condemn Obeah within the context of imperial society. The religious dimensions of Obeah-led rebellions could easily be written off by Christian colonists as “demonic” and illicit. This was not true of revivalist religions which contained many Christian elements. By reasserting African religiosity and justice in a Christian framework, Christian colonists were forced to take the religious arguments of rebels seriously. They were thus more likely to achieve their aims. This was dramatically illustrated by the 1831-1832 rebellion or “Baptist War.” During this rebellion, Native Baptists, a syncretic religious movement, violently revolted against planters who they believed were withholding emancipation from them. The very next year, spurred by this revolution, parliament passed into law the 1833 Slavery Abolition Act.<sup>50</sup> While this may not have been the initial reason for religious revivalists to condemn Obeah, it certainly added incentive to do so.

Considering these examples, it is clear that all depictions of Obeah’s negative qualities could be understood and feared both by those who accepted the supernatural aspects of Obeah and by those who dismissed Obeah’s supernatural dimension. Although poisoning might be done by supernatural means, it did not have to be. Whether Obeah practitioners’ attempts to grant invincibility were successful or not, the point was that they gave rebels courage to fight.<sup>51</sup> Thus, while some clearly feared Obeah for its supernatural power of harm, those who sought to denounce Obeah as superstition and stay within the accepted bounds of enlightenment rationality could still present reasons to demonize and fear Obeah.<sup>52</sup> Even those, like Bell, who posited that Obeah was merely silly and harmless still condemned the political legitimacy of Obeah

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<sup>50</sup> Dianne M. Stewart, *Three Eyes for the Journey: African Dimensions of the Jamaican Religious Experience* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005): 103.

<sup>51</sup> Paton, “Witchcraft, Poison, Law, and Atlantic Slavery.”

<sup>52</sup> For an example of fear of Obeah’s supernatural powers see Henry Hesketh Joudou Bell, *Obeah: Witchcraft in the West Indies*, 4-5.

practitioners. Bell and others like him claimed that even if Obeah practitioners were not dangerous, even if they were ordinary or even beneficial, those who believed in the powers of Obeah were not ready for the vote. Their grasp on reality was too faulty to engage in civilized government.<sup>53</sup> Thus, those in favor of crown rule could approach the topic of Obeah either from a patronizing or a fearful perspective and come to exactly the same conclusion.

### **Arguments for Crown Rule**

Upon first glance, Henry Hesketh Bell's *Obeah* and James Anthony Froude's *The English in the West Indies* have little in common. While Froude made a direct political argument against representative government in the Caribbean by playing on the fears of his metropolitan white audience, the main thrust of Bell's argument was to dispel the fears of white foreigners about Obeah to promote tourism and investment in the West Indies, where he worked as a colonial official. While Froude's rhetoric about Obeah included frequent mentions of cannibalism and poisoning, Bell described Obeah charms benignly as "contain[ing] nothing but seawater, with a little laundry blue in it, and, as you see, a dead cockroach floating on top."<sup>54</sup> Bell even directly addressed Froude, saying that he "goes rather far in his undoubted prejudice against the negroes and colored population of the West Indies" and argued that Froude had spent too little time in the West Indies to speak authoritatively on it.<sup>55</sup> However, Bell's argument addressed Froude's depiction of Obeah as violent rather than his ultimate political conclusion.

Bell did not address Froude's ultimate conclusion that the colored population of the West Indies should not be included in representative government. Indeed, the implications of Bell's work show that he was far from wholly disagreeing. Even though Bell's work was not explicitly

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<sup>53</sup> Bell, *Obeah: Witchcraft in the West Indies*; Paton, "Obeah in the post emancipation era," 142.

<sup>54</sup> Bell, *Obeah*, 4.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid*, 194.

political, his position as a colonial official meant that his opinions about those in his jurisdiction had political applications. Ultimately, both Froude and Bell appear to have agreed that the West Indies were not ready for representative government. To make this claim they argued that the vast majority of West Indians of color believed in Obeah, that Obeah and all other African-derived religions were identical superstitions less rational than Christianity, and that people of color would continue to cling to Obeah because of some inherent aspect of their African ancestry. These elements ultimately made these two authors more similar than their differing tones and goals would suggest.

The first piece of Froude and Bell's arguments concerning Obeah was the assumption that Obeah was widespread throughout the West Indies. Unfortunately, it is extremely difficult to confirm or deny this claim. Due to Obeah's peculiar legal status as illegal but irregularly enforced, the exact number of Obeah practitioners in the West Indies in the late nineteenth century is impossible to discern.<sup>56</sup> Indeed, even contemporaries expressed frustration at being unable to quantify Obeah practitioners in various parts of the West Indies. Greville John Chester, a travel writer, stated, "I regret that I have been able to acquire but little reliable information about the Obeah superstition," and made it clear he only guessed that Obeah belief was widespread.<sup>57</sup> In addition, since people of color faced massive economic, educational, and legal disadvantages, very little writing or direct testimony from Obeah practitioners in the nineteenth century survives today.<sup>58</sup> Even more difficult to determine is how many people sought the direct services of Obeah practitioners or never sought services but still earnestly believed in the power of Obeah and shaped their actions accordingly. Most records about Obeah seem to indicate that,

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<sup>56</sup> Paton, "Obeah in the Post-Emancipation Era," 120-128.

<sup>57</sup> Chester, "Chapter VI. Barbados," 82.

<sup>58</sup> What has survived is mostly archival and thus inaccessible to scholars like me outside of the Caribbean.

especially in rural and agricultural communities, Obeah was an important facet of religious life between 1865 and 1900, considered medicinally, spiritually, and practically useful as well as deeply feared for that same practical power.

However, since most records containing this information come from men like Bell, Froude, and Chester, white or creole elites engaging in pseudo-anthropological studies of the “other,” this information contains bias. This bias almost always favored a sense of fear surrounding Obeah, often depicting believers as being terrorized or deterred by Obeah rather than benefitted by it, and erased ambiguities of belief in black communities.<sup>59</sup> Indeed, Bell referred to his black informants and other members of colored communities uniformly by the name “Quashie.” In Bell’s own words, ““Quashie” proper... should be the lineal descendant of the Africans imported during the time of slavery.”<sup>60</sup> No other qualification was needed to earn this name, nor was a single black informant in Bell’s book referred to as anything other than “Quashie.” In this way, Bell reduced people of color to a mass all of the same type, rather than considering them as individuals with nuanced opinions of their own. Thomas accused Froude of this same racist mistake.<sup>61</sup> For instance, many people who believed in the power of Obeah also considered themselves Christians. There were also significant differences in Obeah traditions, such as the differences between protection measures against the Trinidadian *soucouyant* and the Jamaican “Old Hige,” both witch-like figures or phantasms.<sup>62</sup> However, these differences were

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<sup>59</sup> See Bell, *Obeah*, 15-20 for an example of these types of observations. Bell’s informant, a Catholic priest, finds the house of an Obeah practitioner after his death and emphasizes the fear of the believers who surround the house but refuse to go in. In addition, De Lisser’s *The White Witch of Rose Hall* often depicts Obeah as fearful and black believers as irrational, unreflective, and in masses rather than as individuals.

<sup>60</sup> Bell, *Obeah*, 130.

<sup>61</sup> Thomas, “Introduction,” *Froudacity*.

<sup>62</sup> Giselle Anatol, “Vampires from the Caribbean: The Soucouyant,” *The Gothic Imagination* (December 4, 2009) Accessed November, 2015; De Lisser, *The White Witch of Rosehall*, 147; Note that in the Jamaican tradition, De Lisser describes measures against the Old Hige as consisting of “thick smoke ascending from a pan.” Alternatively, Anatol describes protection measures that include leaving grains of salt or rice on thresholds and forcing the *soucouyant* to count them before she can leave, or putting hot peppers on the *soucouyant*’s abandoned skin.

all easily glossed over because of the assumption that of these traditions were irrational superstitions that needed to be corrected by rational Christianity.

Both Bell and Froude argued that only Christianity (and, in Froude's case, only Protestant Christianity) could be considered a rational religious choice. They condemned all else as superstition. For Froude, this superstition had fearful consequences, while for Bell it was merely silly, but both authors were equally unable to see the similarities between African-derived religious practices and their own systems of belief. Bell's argument, for instance, that Obeah charms were only made out of ordinary objects like "seawater," "a little laundry blue," and a "dead cockroach" failed to recognize the place of ordinary objects held as sacred in Christian traditions, like the communion wafer and wine.<sup>63</sup> Likewise, when Froude argued that, "Obeah is not to be forgotten; and along with Catholic religion goes an active belief in witchcraft and magic," he failed to recall that Protestant Christianity had its own witch scares less than 200 years before him, with witch belief among most Protestants likely extending for much longer.<sup>64</sup> Indeed, some have recently argued that western style witch belief in Africa probably had its source in European colonization and the slave trade, filtered through local ideas about what was considered appropriate or inappropriate use of supernatural power.<sup>65</sup> Instead of recognizing the similarities between African-derived and Christian religious traditions, Bell took for granted that Christianity was a "convincing truth" while Froude argued that only Christianity contained sufficient motivation (fear of hell and desire for heaven) to "prevent the flesh and the devil from

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<sup>63</sup> Paton, "Obeah in the Post-Emancipation Era," 140.

<sup>64</sup> Froude, *The English in the West Indies*, 134; C L'Estrange Ewen, *Appendix VI Depositions. Witch Hunting and Witch Trials: The Indictments for Witchcraft from the Records of the 1373 Assizes Held from the Home Court 1559-1736 AD* (New York: Routledge, 1929); Lorraine Daston and Katharine Park, *Wonders and the Order of Nature: 1150-1750* (New York: Zone, 1998).

<sup>65</sup> John Thornton, "Cannibals, Witches, and Slave Traders in the Atlantic World," In *William and Mary Quarterly* Series 3, Vol. 60, No. 2 (April 2003): 273-294.

having too much power over Negroes.”<sup>66</sup> In this way, imperialists of the late nineteenth century argued dogmatically for the Christian faith against all others, assuming with very little inspection that their religion was the most rational.

Once imperialists established that only Christianity was a rational religious choice, it then became much easier to equate all other religious traditions as equally irrational. Of the African-derived spiritual traditions, few were more frequently equated than Obeah and *Vodou*. It is impossible to deny that Haitian *Vodou* and Obeah have some common elements and lineage; however, many imperialists in the late nineteenth century erroneously saw them as identical. Froude and Bell both breezily equated the two. Bell equated them by including a lengthy discussion of religion in “Hayti” in his book on Obeah.<sup>67</sup> Froude equated them by refusing to refer to the Haitian religion as *Vodou* or Voodoo, instead merely referring to it as Obeah.<sup>68</sup> This equation was often used to set up a comparison not only between religions, but between the colonies of Haiti and the British West Indies. This was worrying for imperialists, since the Haitian revolution had so violently and infamously shaken off French imperialism, creating a black republic in 1804. Since Obeah was already closely associated with rebellion, this leap merely reinforced what people already assumed about Obeah’s political potential.

Despite the Haitian revolution’s relatively early date, this comparison between the Haitian revolution and the revolutions-that-might-be in the British West Indies reached an especially feverish pitch in England in and after 1884. This rise in hysteria was caused in large part by the publication of Spenser St John’s book *Hayti, or the Black Republic* and the gradual re-introduction of self-rule to Jamaica. This book argued that in order to avoid total corruption by

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<sup>66</sup> A quote from Froude cited by Thomas in Thomas, “Religion for Negroes,” 171.

<sup>67</sup> Bell, *Obeah*, 52-58.

<sup>68</sup> Froude, *The English in the West Indies*, 86, 111, 144.

the African element, as seen in Haiti, the West Indies would need to be ruled by a civilizing force.<sup>69</sup> Froude extended this claim in 1888 by arguing that giving political representation to black West Indians would result in people of color taking revenge for slavery on white West Indians, as he claimed had happened in Haiti.<sup>70</sup> In addition, St John's book was the source of many poorly documented and even more poorly contextualized claims that Haiti was dominated by *Vodou* and that *Vodou* encouraged cannibalism.<sup>71</sup> Both Bell and Froude used St John's book as a source for this claim. Froude in particular said that unless his political logic were followed "these beautiful countries will become like Hayti, with Obeah triumphant, and children offered to the devil and salted and eaten."<sup>72</sup>

Hayti was not the only rebellious nation compared to the West Indies. Froude also frequently mentioned the similarities between West Indian rebellions and the Indian mutiny of 1857, a rebellion that had, unlike the Haitian Revolution, ended in tightened colonial control. In fact, Froude argued that the West Indies should adopt an authoritarian government similar to the authoritarian colonial government that had been imposed in India after the mutiny. This, of course, seemed to ignore the fact that Jamaica under Edward Joh Eyre had imposed an authoritarian martial government in response to the 1865 Morant Bay Rebellion and it had resulted in catastrophe.<sup>73</sup> However, Froude argued that Eyre's application of martial law should not be considered a true authoritarian system, instead saying "the fault was not in Mr. Eyre... but in those who insisted on applying a constitutional form of government to a country where the

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<sup>69</sup> Paton, "Obeah in the Post-Emancipation Era," 128.

<sup>70</sup> Froude, *The English in the West Indies*, 7.

<sup>71</sup> Paton, "Obeah in the Post-Emancipation Era," 128.

<sup>72</sup> Froude, *The English in the West Indies*, 144.

<sup>73</sup> Brady, 406.

population is so unfavorably divided.”<sup>74</sup> In this way, he blamed the Morant Bay Rebellion and its bloody aftermath not on a miscarriage of martial law, but on representative government.

This mindset of comparison was so ingrained, especially comparison to Haiti, that one only needed to compare Obeah to *Vodou* to imply all of the political baggage of comparing Haiti to the West Indies. Thus, while Froude made his argument explicit, saying, “In spite of schools and missionaries, the dark connection still maintains itself with Satan’s invisible world, and modern education contends in vain with Obeah worship. As it has been in Hayti, so it must be in Trinidad if the English leave the blacks to be their own masters,” Bell needed only mention “Hayti” and its political state of affairs concerning “Voodoo” and Obeah to imply a similar argument about the West Indies.<sup>75</sup> One quote in particular makes it apparent that Bell equated Obeah and *Vodou*, with political implications: “Cases of cannibalism have been reported, and nowhere in the West Indies has Obeah a more tenacious hold over high and low than in Hayti. Such a shocking state of affairs cannot be allowed to continue long, and covetous eyes are cast towards Hayti by more than one of the great powers.”<sup>76</sup> Bell’s implication was clearly that if Obeah was not tempered, if it gained a “tenacious hold,” then it could cause great harm, even leading people to cannibalism. To prevent this from happening, Bell believed that direct rule by one of the “great powers” was the clear solution.

In addition to equating Obeah and Haitian *Vodou*, Bell used Haiti as supporting evidence for claims made about Africans and African descendants. He thus extended his argument concerning the specific similarities of Obeah and *Vodou* to a more generalizable claim about black people and religion. He first cited a long passage from seventeenth century missionary

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<sup>74</sup> Froude, *The English in the West Indies*, 261.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid*, 86.

<sup>76</sup> Bell, *Obeah*, 58.

Pere Labat's writings, stating that "black and coloured inhabitants of these countries, unfortunately their warm temperament, their libertine and inconstant character, the facility and impunity with which they can commit crime, renders them very unfit to embrace religion." Labat argued that even those people of color who converted to Christianity

are easily converted when out of their native land, and persevere in Christianity so long as they see the example set if they find no advantage in doing otherwise; but if these conditions be wanting, they speedily forget the promises they made at baptism, the obligations they have contracted, and the convincing truths they have been taught.<sup>77</sup>

This quote made deeply racist assumptions that the actions of African descendants were based not on their rationality or piety, but on some fact of their constitution that made them prone to criminality, inconsistency, and generally "uncivilized" behavior. Bell responded to this racist text by calling Labat "quaint" and "perhaps severe" but ultimately by affirming his statement, saying "later events have proved that his assertions were pretty correct, as may be seen in the case of "Hayti" or "San Domingo.""<sup>78</sup>

This quote clearly shows that Bell's arguments had racial groundwork. This runs counter to Paton's argument that Bell helped to dispel the idea that Africans were barbarous while Europeans were rational.<sup>79</sup> Bell's conformity to Labat's arguments reveals a racial bias. This bias led him to believe that any belief system or person with African lineage, including Obeah and its practitioners, was more likely to act in an uncivilized manner if not ruled by colonial incentive. This certainly would have informed his actions as a colonial official and made him unlikely to support the adoption of representative government. However, Bell's racism certainly pales in comparison to Froude's more blatant racial bias.

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<sup>77</sup> Bell, *Obeah*, 52-53.

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid*, 56.

<sup>79</sup> Paton, "Obeah in the Post-Emancipation Era," 142.

Indeed, unlike Bell, whose main topic was Obeah and whose opinions regarding representative government in 1889 remain unknown, Froude's main topic was whether or not the West Indies should ever be granted representative government. More so, it quickly became clear that what Froude meant to ask was whether *people of color* in the West Indies should ever be granted representative rights. His answer was a resounding, definitive no. Obeah, to Froude, was not a main point of study, but only compelling evidence of "emaciated negroe morals" and the need for British domination.<sup>80</sup> Indeed, Froude argued that people of color were happier without representation, saying,

As long as the present system holds, there will be an appreciable addition to the sum of human (colored human) happiness. Lighter-hearted creatures do not exist on the globe. But the continuance of it depends on the continuance of English rule. The peace and order which they benefit by is not of their own creation...<sup>81</sup> The blacks do not care for politics, and would be pleased to see them swept away to-morrow if they would be governed wisely and fairly.<sup>82</sup>

Each of these quotes was further emphasized with warnings of what would happen if "black parliamentary institutions" were to thrive. These warnings invariably included the domination of "African Obeah" and things becoming "as it has been in Hayti."<sup>83</sup> Indeed, both Bell and Froude's connection of Haitian *Vodou* with Obeah seemed to have less to do with the actual similarities of the two traditions and more to do with each spiritualities' connection to Africa and blackness. It was, in fact, by virtue of being "African" that both of these spiritualities were condemned as uncivilized superstitions, and by virtue of race more than belief that the constituents of these practices were held governmentally suspect by Bell and Froude.

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<sup>80</sup> Froude, *The English in the West Indies*, 134.

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid*, 86.

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid*, 144.

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid*, 86, 111, 144.

Froude, Bell, and other advocates of direct imperial control, then, based their arguments around some central premises: first, that the vast majority of West Indians of color believed in Obeah; second, that Obeah and all other African-derived religions were less rational than Christianity and thus superstitions; third, that as Obeah and *Vodou* were equally irrational as African-derived traditions, they were identical; fourth, Haiti thus served as a fair model for what would happen to the British West Indies if they were allowed representative government; and fifth, that people of color could not be convinced by missionary education to refute Obeah belief because of an inherent aspect of their African ancestry; therefore, the West Indies, and particularly West Indians of color, should not have representative government. As an alternative, both Froude and Bell placed their faith in direct British rule, arguing that this was ultimately best for all inhabitants. Thus, whether these advocates of crown rule saw Obeah as fearsome or merely silly, they ultimately reached the same conclusion with many of the same racist arguments. All those contesting the conclusion of imperialists like Froude and Bell thus had to address and seek to disprove one or more of these premises.

### **Imperial Reformers: Arguments for Representative Government**

Imperial reformers challenged advocates of crown rule by denying their initial assertion that most people of color in the West Indies believed in Obeah, their fourth premise that Haiti represented a fair comparison for the West Indies, and their final premise that African-descended people would continue to believe in Obeah because of their race. Instead, these advocates of representative government within the imperial system argued that the British government would merely need to continue its missionary and education programs, and Obeah belief would disappear. The British West Indies would then be perfectly capable of maintaining civilization through representative government. Exactly how and with what degree of harsh enforcement

these education measures should have been carried out remained under debate. Indeed, they argued that all educated people in the West Indies, regardless of race, already saw Obeah as a “superstition,” and that Haiti served as an unfair comparison because black Haitians never received religious education before their independence. Although these sources did challenge many of Froude and Bell’s blatantly racist claims, especially that African-descended people were impossible or extremely difficult to educate, they ultimately continued to accept restrictive colonial beliefs about Africa and African-derived religions. Their arguments continued to assume that Christianity was superior to African-derived religious practices and that practitioners of these religions were not capable of maintaining civilized society through representative government.

The main proponents of this argument and conspicuous opponents of Froude were John Jacob Thomas, Nicholas Darnell Davis, and C.S. Salmon.<sup>84</sup> Thomas’s book-length rebuttal to Froude, *Froudacity*, has received the most scholarly attention, but all of these sources deserve close consideration both for their similarities and their specific differences. Thomas’s *Froudacity* functions very earnestly and passionately by first accepting Froude’s terms of civilization, then refuting Froude’s claims that black West Indians did not live up to those terms, and finally by showing that Froude himself did not live up to his demands for others. Nicholas Darnell Davis’s *Mr. Froude’s Negrophobia, or Don Quixote as a Cook’s Tourist* took a more satirically biting approach, but ultimately echoed Thomas. Finally, C.S. Salmon’s *The Caribbean Confederation* set itself apart from Thomas and Darnell Davis by refuting another of Froude’s claims, that all African and African-derived religions were essentially the same. It is also unlikely that all three

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<sup>84</sup> Paton, “Obeah in the Post-Emancipation Era,” 133; None of these authors addressed Bell as his book was published in 1889, after their responses to Froude had already been written. His text was likely not directly political enough to warrant a separate response.

authors agreed on how Obeah should have been handled legally. Despite some differences, all three authors shared an ultimate political goal. These three authors directly stated their aim of proving the worthiness of black West Indians to participate in representative government. Nonetheless, all, to some extent, adopted Eurocentric ideals of civilization.

Thomas's refutation of Froude's arguments is the most famous of the three responses, likely for its passion, length, and the masterful way in which Thomas turned all of Froude's arguments against him. Thomas was a Trinidadian linguistic scholar and political writer. The son of former slaves and a schoolmaster, Thomas had personal stake in disproving Froude's arguments against people of color and the ability of the education system to serve them.<sup>85</sup> He directly denied Froude's argument that, without imperial rule, the West Indies would sink into "Obeahism, devil-worship, and children-eating."<sup>86</sup> Instead, he argued that Obeah was sinking into obscurity and that any "educated African mind" in the West Indies accepted the most important articles of the Christian faith.<sup>87</sup> Thomas believed that (Christian) religion was "purely a matter of feeling and action between man and man—the doing unto others as he would do unto us."<sup>88</sup> His claim that Christian practice was more important than formal religious knowledge left room for uneducated believers as well as those with nuances of belief, even religious revivalists who mixed African and Christian beliefs.<sup>89</sup> Unlike Froude and Bell, Thomas did not necessitate the reduction of black belief to one standard. Rather, Thomas argued that application of the Christian "golden rule" was enough to legitimize anyone for political representation.

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<sup>85</sup> John Gilmore, "Thomas, John Jacob," *The Oxford Companion to Black British History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007).

<sup>86</sup> Paton, "Obeah in the Post-Emancipation Era," 133.

<sup>87</sup> Thomas, *Froudacity*, 166.

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid*, 169.

<sup>89</sup> Indeed Stewart argues in *Three Eyes for the Journey* that the placing of orthopraxy over orthodoxy was likely an African-derived trait itself, as many African religions believed in the primacy of action over belief. Thomas himself would likely not have claimed this connection, but it is nonetheless worth considering.

Thomas then used this premise to argue against Froude's claim that white people retained spiritual superiority. While Thomas accepted Froude's statement that, perhaps when African slaves first met missionaries, white people had superior spiritual knowledge, he denied that spiritual superiority continued to belong to any particular class or race since missionaries had encountered Africans.<sup>90</sup> Thomas then included a list of remarkable people of color who upheld Christian values by doing service to others to drive home his point. After this, Thomas turned Froude's own argument against him, accusing Froude of not acting in a Christian manner. Thomas argued that "any creed or any doctrine which directly or indirectly subverts or even weakens this basis [the golden rule] is in itself a danger to the highest welfare of mankind."<sup>91</sup> He clearly believed Froude's *The English in the West Indies* was one of these dangers, and he made this clear, asking:

"Is not Duty the first, the highest item of moral consciousness; and is not promoting, according to our best ability, the welfare of our fellow-creatures, the first and most urgent call of human duty? [Froude] contemptuously ignor[es] his share of this solemn responsibility... to observe at least the negative obligation never to wantonly do or even devise any harm to his fellows."<sup>92</sup>

Thomas thus called Froude out on his racism and implicated him on his own standards. In one masterful stroke, he made a strong case for the piety of black West Indians and undercut Froude's blatantly prejudiced arguments by showing them to be internally inconsistent.

While Thomas's arguments successfully refuted Froude on his own terms, one of the most glaring aspects of his argument was his acceptance of those terms from the beginning. His constant grouping of "Obeah, devil-worship, and child-eating" shows that Thomas also equated those three concepts.<sup>93</sup> While he argued that Froude's comparison of the West Indies to Haiti was

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<sup>90</sup> Thomas, *Froudacity*, 167.

<sup>91</sup> *Ibid*, 168.

<sup>92</sup> *Ibid*, 169.

<sup>93</sup> Paton, "Obeah in the Post-Emancipation Era," 134.

unfair, he accepted Froude's depiction of Haiti as uncivilized and barbarous. In fact, Thomas seemed to accept the larger imperial discourse that Obeah, Haiti, and all things connected with Africa were inferior to those things like Christianity and enlightenment-style education connected with Europe.

Nicholas Darnell Davis also accepted this imperial discourse. Like Thomas, he argued that, while Obeah was present in the West Indies, it was not dominant, and that believers in Obeah were quickly declining.<sup>94</sup> Darnell Davis was an Englishman whose family had a long history in Grenada. He had spent a great deal of time as a colonial servant, first as the personal secretary of the Governor of Grenada and then as a clerk for various governmental departments in British Guiana, where he resided at the time of the publication of *Mr. Froude's Negrophobia, or Don Quixote as a Cook's Tourist*. In addition, Darnell Davis was an historian of the West Indies. He thus had both professional qualifications and lived experience on which to contest Froude.<sup>95</sup> It was on these grounds that Darnell Davis contested many of the historical inaccuracies in Froude's works, his first-impression assumptions, and his internal contradictions. He especially criticized Froude for declining an invitation in Port-of-Spain to attend a public meeting which featured "a solid part of the Islanders desiring that some portion of the Legislative Council of the colony should be elected by votes of the Taxpayers, instead of, as at present, all the members being nominated by the Crown."<sup>96</sup> Davis saw this as a clear example of Froude's unwillingness to hear opinions that contradicted his own or associate with people outside of the elite upper class.

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<sup>94</sup> *Ibid*, 135.

<sup>95</sup> Lewis Wilder Hicks, "Memoirs of the New England Historic Genealogical Society," In *The New England Historical and Genealogical Register*, Vol. 72, supplement (Boston: Society at the Robert Henry Eddy Memorial Rooms, 1918): xxxii-xxxiii.

<sup>96</sup> Nicholas Darnell Davis, *Mr. Froude's Negrophobia, or Don Quixote as a Cook's Tourist* (Demerara: The "Argosy" Press, 1888): 2-6.

Although his article was satirical, frequently comparing Froude to the imaginative Don Quixote, Darnell Davis's political message was serious and explicit. He argued that Obeah had already declined to such an extent that the West Indies were prepared for representative government. He even argued that, ideally, "in ages now far off, the connection between Great Britain and her West Indian Possessions may be dissolved."<sup>97</sup> Darnell Davis distanced himself from Froude's depictions of Haiti more than Thomas, calling into question Froude's claims concerning cannibalism. However, he still argued that comparisons between the colonies were unfair, and that the Haitian revolution was "pure barbarism."<sup>98</sup> In addition, his definitions of civilization still seemed to be largely measured by distance from Africa. He argued, for instance, that Obeah had not yet disappeared because "it is but eighty two years since Englishmen ceased to take part in the Slave Trade. Up to 1806, thousands of slaves were brought year by year to the Islands from Africa... These people were all steeped in the superstitions of the Dark Continent."<sup>99</sup> Clearly, in Darnell Davis's mind as well as Froude and Thomas's, black people in the West Indies proved themselves civilized largely by their adoption of European customs and religions and by rejection of ancestral African ones.

C.S. Salmon's arguments against Froude in *The Caribbean Confederation* were more critical of the idea that connection to Africa automatically indicated a lack of civility. This was likely because Salmon himself had spent a significant amount of time living in Sierra Leon. Indeed, during his time in Sierra Leon, Salmon often argued for rule by African chiefs rather than colonial administrators. He also claimed that some parts of Africa were governed respectably without imperial intervention and thus ought to be left independent.<sup>100</sup> In regards to

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<sup>97</sup> Davis, *Mr. Froude's Negrophobia*, 45.

<sup>98</sup> Paton, "Obeah in the Post-Emancipation Era," 135.

<sup>99</sup> Davis, *Mr. Froude's Negrophobia*, 33-34.

<sup>100</sup> *Ibid*, 136.

the West Indies, Salmon argued in *The Caribbean Confederation* that all British West Indian possessions ought to be made into a single confederation. In his vision, this confederation would be led by a representative government and connected to the British Empire only to the extent that colonies like Canada and Australia were.<sup>101</sup> His political argument was thus the most liberal of the three reformist views. In addition to denying the colonialists' first, fourth, and final claim, Salmon was the only one of these three imperial reformers to refute their third claim that all African and African-derived religious traditions were identical.

Salmon refuted the claim that all African religious practices were identical by denying Froude's argument that the cannibalism of Haitian *Vodou* practitioners was a resurgence of African traditions. He stated, instead, unambiguously, "The worship Mr. Froude says has been "revived" in Hayti has no counterpart in Africa. The people of the continent do not kill and eat children in their religious rites."<sup>102</sup> After which, he continued to describe many different religious and sacrificial African ceremonies, none of which amounted to ceremonial child eating. Thus, Salmon argued, West Indians ran no risk of becoming "like Hayti" by returning to their African roots, because the African religious roots that Froude appealed to did not in fact resemble Haitian *Vodou*.

In addition, Salmon argued that the "black races" of the West Indies expressed different personality traits depending on the type of European rule they lived under; for instance, black Haitians adopted French traits while black Jamaicans adopted English traits. To him, these differences in custom proved that "the African, unlike the picture given of him by Mr. Froude, is open to civilising influences, and is affected by his surroundings the same as any European might

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<sup>101</sup> Salmon, Charles Spencer. *The Caribbean Confederation*. London: Cassell & Company, Limited, 1888.

<sup>102</sup> *Ibid*, 92.

be.”<sup>103</sup> In essence, through a series of oddly specific stereotypes about European nationalities, Salmon made an argument that culture affected people regardless of race. This totally undermined Froude and Bell’s claims that African descendants were utterly controlled by some essential fact of their biology or shared history. One extension of this cultural argument clearly had religious dimensions, suggesting that black West Indians were open to and capable of religious conversion.

It is important to note that, despite Salmon’s more liberal views, he nonetheless agreed wholeheartedly with advocates of crown rule that Christianity was superior to African “paganism,” and that Haiti had “gone very wrong indeed in many directions.”<sup>104</sup> Salmon stated that the African religions he witnessed during his time in Africa “teaches [the African] no morality, no sense of right and wrong, and no duties.”<sup>105</sup> In fact, when describing the utter failure of slave owners in Haiti to instruct their slaves about the Catholic religion, he asked, “The Christian religion has no solid footing in Hayti, and can we expect civilization without it?”<sup>106</sup> Although Salmon argued that British colonists had failed in providing moral instruction for former slaves through “mismanagement of governments,” he nonetheless seemed to believe that the British West Indies were at least much more predominantly Christian than Haiti, and thus much more prepared for participation in government.<sup>107</sup> Salmon only brought up Obeah when talking about Froude’s comparison of the West Indies to Haiti, but this lack of attention is perhaps evidence itself that Salmon granted very little credibility to the claim that Obeah was rampant in the British West Indies.<sup>108</sup>

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<sup>103</sup> *Ibid.*, 89.

<sup>104</sup> *Ibid.*, 90.

<sup>105</sup> *Ibid.*, 92.

<sup>106</sup> *Ibid.*, 95

<sup>107</sup> *Ibid.*, 23.

<sup>108</sup> Paton, “Obeah in the Post-Emancipation Era,” 137.

Clearly, then, despite his liberal political stances and avoidance of the blatant racism of Froude and Bell, Salmon, like the rest of the imperial reformers, clung to Eurocentric religious definitions of civilization. Like Thomas and Darnell Davis, he unreflectively lauded Christianity as the only rational, dutiful, civilized religion and thought people of color were only worthy of representative government to the extent they accepted this “civilizing” religion and rejected African-derived practices like Obeah.

While Thomas, Darnell Davis, Salmon, and others like them all agreed that black West Indians were capable of representative government once educated in enlightenment-style and Christian institutions, imperial reformers disagreed on exactly how law should factor into this education process. What degree of legal harshness was most effective to disincentivize Obeah was under much debate. This was an incredibly important question to these imperial reformers since, to them, the representative government they so craved hinged on their ability to eliminate Obeah from the West Indies.

While practicing Obeah had been punishable by severe measures from whipping to death under slave codes, Obeah was mostly folded into much milder vagrancy laws after emancipation. This was a part of a larger immediate post-emancipation strategy that focused on missionary education in the West Indies to reform the beliefs of ex-slaves.<sup>109</sup> During this time, most governmental officials agreed with the Antiguan stipendiary magistrate, which stated that the death penalty was no longer an appropriate legal response to Obeah because it “only confirmed [the majority of the population] in their belief that supernatural powers were really possessed by [those convicted], of which they could be only deprived by death.”<sup>110</sup> However, by the 1850s and 60s, just before and during the Morant Bay Rebellion, it became increasingly clear to West

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<sup>109</sup> Paton, “Obeah in the Post-Emancipation Era,” 122.

<sup>110</sup> *Ibid.*, 123.

Indian officials that Obeah practice was not decreasing with missionary intervention. In response, some imperialists began arguing for harsher laws, saying that previous laws were “far too lenient—and should certainly be superseded by a much more severe one; so that by the operation of that statute the abominable crime of “Obeah” may be partially suppressed or...permanently removed.”<sup>111</sup> Some colonies did indeed pass harsher laws during the midcentury including Guyana, which made merely consulting with an Obeah practitioner illegal.<sup>112</sup>

This uptick in legislation against Obeah was not without its controversy. This controversy did not appear because elites were in favor of Obeah flourishing, but because some believed that by imposing more measures against Obeah, it signaled to potential believers that Obeah practitioners held significant power. These imperialists believed that by keeping Obeah sentences light, people would see that West Indian governments saw Obeah as a superstition and not a serious threat. British officials in particular were in favor of mild Obeah policies after the model of Barbados, which was viewed by British officials as the most advanced of the West Indian colonies.<sup>113</sup> After the return of local government to Jamaica in 1884, Jamaicans eventually ruled in favor of stricter Obeah laws and passed the 1898 Jamaican Obeah Law, which made not only Obeah practice, but consulting with an Obeah practitioner punishable by jail time. In addition, it equated Myalism, another African-derived spirituality that will be discussed in the next section, with Obeah by law.<sup>114</sup>

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<sup>111</sup> Sancho, "To The Editor of the Nevis Guardian," *The Nevis Guardian* (Charlestown, Nevis: 23 Sept. 1871): 6, *America's Historical Newspapers*, Accessed 25 Apr. 2016.

<sup>112</sup> Paton, "Obeah in the Post-Emancipation Era," 123-124.

<sup>113</sup> *Ibid.*, 125.

<sup>114</sup> Jamaica, *The Obeah Law*.

This law was passed not by conservatives like Froude or Bell, but by middle-class progressives like John Castello, a newspaper proprietor and member of the Town Party which represented urban merchants and people of color.<sup>115</sup> This debate continued well into the twentieth century and revealed a religious preoccupation of those who argued for and involved themselves actively in representative government. Even though imperial reformers discounted crown rule advocates' claims about the prevalence of Obeah practice, the difficulty in educating black West Indians, and the comparability of Haiti and the British West Indies, ridding the West Indies entirely of Obeah still seemed, to them, an essential part of maintaining civilization in a representative system.

### **Revolutionary Revivalists: Movements for Decolonization**

Religious revivalists of the late nineteenth century agreed that Obeah needed to be wiped out; however, their reasons were strikingly different from advocates of crown rule or imperial reformers. Religious revivalists denied all of crown rule advocates' premises to some extent, but the most important of which was the idea that all African-derived religions were inferior to Christianity. When I refer to religious revivalists, I am referring specifically to religious actors in the mid to late nineteenth century who observed religions with African-derived and Christian components. Other scholars have used this term in a broader sense to encompass all populist religious movements in the British West Indies during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, but for the sake of specificity concerning Obeah opinion and time period, I will be using a narrower definition. These religious revivalists did not dispute Obeah on the grounds that it was uncivilized or inferior to European religions, but that it was destructive, evil, and communally disruptive. Religious revivalists, as people involved in populist movements,

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<sup>115</sup> Paton, "Obeah in the Post-Emancipation Era," 124.

necessarily had a less unified voice than crown rule advocates or imperial reformers; however, most seemed to believe in some form of representative government, and many believed in total independence from the British Empire. This was a logical conclusion when considering that the British Empire made its explicit mission the conversion of all black West Indians to European Christianity and the enforcement cultural and religious hegemony.

The first religious revivalist group to conspicuously attack Obeah was Myal. Myal may have referred, in eighteenth and early nineteenth century Jamaica, to black herbal and medicinal healers. However, Myal took on a different meaning in the 1840s-1860s as an organized religion with Christian as well as African elements in what was derisively called the Myal Outbreak.<sup>116</sup> Although Myal is frequently labeled as a solely African-derived, rather than a syncretic, religion, it is important to note that the Myalist of the mid nineteenth century drew heavily from Christian traditions, even calling themselves “Christian Myalists.” Likely because of Myal’s similarities to Obeah and recognizing that Obeah was simply depicted too negatively to associate with and expect legal legitimacy, Myal practitioners searched ways to divorce themselves from the politically toxic spirituality. Myalists also likely tried to divorce themselves from Obeah because of its previously explored association with anti-communality and greed, both qualities which Myalism held in deep disregard. For these reasons, Myalists began denouncing Obeah so often it became almost synonymous with evil in Myalist traditions.<sup>117</sup>

Myalists practiced ecstatic rituals involving singing and dancing, attempted to “dig up” Obeah, and even used physical violence to cleanse people of evil.<sup>118</sup> One leader of a Myalist group said he was “sent by God to cleanse the earth” and that Obeah “must be dug up, before the

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<sup>116</sup> Stewart, *Three Eyes for the Journey*, 10.

<sup>117</sup> Paton, “Obeah in the Post-Emancipation Era,” 148.

<sup>118</sup> *Ibid*, 149.

Lord Jesus would come again.”<sup>119</sup> In addition to these strong measures to weed out evil, Myalists placed a large emphasis on healing. They introduced a great number of “balm yards” which provided spiritually protective baths, first aid, lodging for those who were ill or injured, and a variety of other spiritual and physical healing services. These yards were visited by a wide range of patrons from all races and classes, although they were mostly located in poor black areas with the most need.<sup>120</sup> Indeed, Myalists started a long tradition of balm yards that later religious revivalists, including, most notably, Revival Zion practitioners, would continue. Balm yards would remain the main meeting place of religious revivalists throughout the twentieth century.<sup>121</sup> Despite Myalists’ attempts to separate themselves from Obeah practitioners in the public and official mind, they were ultimately equated with Obeah in the 1898 Jamaican Obeah Law, from which point Myal practices were considered illegal.<sup>122</sup>

However, for at least 38 years, Myalism allowed Jamaicans to recognize the revolutionary potential of religious revivalism. The Falmouth Post on October 19, 1842 argued that the state should attempt to suppress Myal or “the colony from one end to the other, may be lighted by rebellious torches.”<sup>123</sup> Although there had been no rebellious actions connected to Myal at the time, and the Falmouth Post had thus no real evidence on which to support their alarmism, there was no doubt that Myal challenged the social order. Myal mixed African-derived practices with Christianity, challenging stark definitions of what was African and what was European. It also provided a place for all Jamaicans, but especially Jamaicans of color, to gather and unite around a common cause. In addition, it provided strong leadership roles for women

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<sup>119</sup> In the Falmouth Post (Jamaica), 19 October 1842, found in Paton, “Obeah in the Post-Emancipation Era,” 149.

<sup>120</sup> Paton, “Obeah in the Post-Emancipation Era,” 150.

<sup>121</sup> Stewart, *Three Eyes for the Journey*, 107.

<sup>122</sup> Jamaica, *The Obeah Law*.

<sup>123</sup> In the Falmouth Post, 19 October 1842, found in Paton, “Obeah in the Post-Emancipation Era,” 149.

that the Christian missionary church rarely did.<sup>124</sup> In this way, it undermined colonial patriarchal and white supremacist hierarchies and, in the words of historian W.F. Elkins “influenced the rising national consciousness of the Jamaican masses.... and helped shaped popular resistance to colonialism.”<sup>125</sup> This early religious revivalist movement served as a precursor to many religious revival movements that sprang up throughout the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Many of these later movements shared similar populist and anti-imperial fervor and would also be legislated against in a number of underhanded ways.

Other religious revival movements like Spiritual or Native Baptism, Bedwardism, and Revival Zion would challenge the social order more overtly. After all, it was a black Baptist Preacher, Paul Bogle, who led the Morant Bay Rebellion and advocated for racial justice. Syncretic religious practices like Revival Zion, Spiritual Baptism, and others involved practices like voluntary isolation upon initiation, the ringing of bells, the drawing of seals, and speaking in tongues. Like most ecstatic religious revivals, they also often included spiritual possession or profoundly emotional religious experiences.<sup>126</sup> This fell outside of most missionary sanctioned behaviors, which tended to emphasize the order and obeisance of Christianity.<sup>127</sup> Many of these syncretic religions were inspired by so called neo-African cults like Orisha, which worshipped the Yoruba Orishas, most notably Shango, and experienced massive growth in numbers in the 1840s and 50s. This growth can be attributed to an influx of Yoruba-speaking ‘liberated Africans’ in the West Indies, especially in Trinidad. These liberated Africans were people rescued from American slave ships by British sailors between the abolition of British slavery and

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<sup>124</sup> Paton, “Obeah in the Post-Emancipation Era,” 149-151.

<sup>125</sup> Elkins, W.F. *Street Preachers, Faith Healers, and Herb Doctors in Jamaica 1890-1925* (New York: Revisionist Press, 1977): 6.

<sup>126</sup> Paton, “Obeah in the Post-Emancipation Era,” 150-151.

<sup>127</sup> See Bell’s depiction of the Catholic missionary in Bell, *Obeah*, 15-20 and De Lisser’s depiction of Rider, a Jamaican missionary, in De Lisser, *The White Witch of Rose Hall*.

the American Civil War. In fact, Spiritual Baptists would often attend both Baptist and Orisha ceremonies.<sup>128</sup> By virtue of being African or mixing African traditions with Christian theology, these religious movements already challenged the Imperial order which so privileged European Christianity.

Despite their similar positions as African-derived spiritualities that challenged the colonial order, later religious revivalist traditions likely continued to fear and condemn Obeah as a hostile spiritual power. Few to no primary sources containing direct evidence of this continued hostility towards Obeah are accessible outside of Caribbean archives. After all, most religious revivalist meetings were conducted orally. When sermons were transcribed, they mostly went unpublished. Additionally, and likely because of these accessibility issues, very little secondary work has been done on this topic in the field of history. Most scholarship has focused on late twentieth through twenty first century religious opinions, and has been conducted by religious studies scholars or anthropologists. In order to avoid presentism, especially when considering such a unique moment in Jamaican socio-religious history, I have thus almost solely used Diana Paton's research to make this claim. The significant overlap in Myalist, Spiritual Baptist, Orisha, and Revival Zion congregations would indicate that there was strong conformity of opinion concerning religious outsiders, and thus Obeah, between these groups. However, significantly more research, especially archival research, needs to be done in this field to strengthen this argument.

Since later religious revivalists likely saw Obeah as evil, they had to take measures to protect themselves against hostile Obeah practitioners. Legal means to protect against Obeah were mostly inaccessible to religious revivalists. Even when religious revivalists had the time

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<sup>128</sup> Paton, "Obeah in the Post-Emancipation Era," 151.

and money to lay charges against those who they believed were using Obeah against them, these charges were not guaranteed to be taken seriously. Just like the difference in the severity of Obeah laws, while some Obeah trials were taken very seriously and ended in steep sentences for the Obeah practitioner, many others ended patronizingly, such as this 1870 Barbadian case:

“*Thomas Smith* appeared to answer a complaint brought against him by William Boyce, charging him with threatening to do his wife some bodily harm. The case turned out to be one of a laughable nature in which the weak and ignorant class are led away by a belief in obeah... one morning [Boyce’s wife] found on her premises, a package containing a broken vial, some hair, salt, and other old rubbish, which she considered to be obeah and on her husband’s coming home, told him of it. His Worship without entering further into details of the case recommended the parties leave the court and go home, and live more neighborly.”<sup>129</sup>

Legal means were thus an unreliable method of dealing with Obeah for religious revivalists. For this reason, they mostly utilized prayer and rituals to protect themselves.

The great irony of this was that, when British officials encountered these protective measures, they often labeled them *as* Obeah. A Jamaican *Daily Gleaner* editorial, for instance, queried whether “low class revival meetings should not be brought within reach of the law” as they were “becoming more and more the feeders of obeahism.”<sup>130</sup> This was especially true of Orisha which contained no Christian elements. Greville John Chester was almost certainly referring to liberated Africans practicing Orisha when he said, “Few districts are without its Obeah doctor; but the “new lights,” the Mr. Humes, the Professor Holloways, the Dr. Cummings of the craft, are certain privates of a West Indian regiment, lately arrived from Africa with a knowledge of the latest doctrinal quackeries.”<sup>131</sup> Indeed, some Orisha practitioners were tried for Obeah in the West Indies, despite their protests that they were practicing a different religion

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<sup>129</sup> “Police Court,” *The Times* (Bridgetown, Barbados: 20 July 1870): 2.

<sup>130</sup> ‘Obeahism Extraordinary,’ *Daily Gleaner*, 5 May 1899, found in Paton, “Obeah in the Post-Emancipation Era,” 152.

<sup>131</sup> Chester, “Chapter VI. Barbados,” 82.

altogether. Additionally, in multiple colonies, laws were passed to criminalize practicing medicine without a license, some specific clauses of which seemed to be aimed at balm houses and their counterparts.<sup>132</sup>

Legislation against revivalist movements only caused them to become more politicized. Alexander Bedward, leader of the Bedwardist religious movement (another Baptist revival branch), preached to thousands of his followers that “the black wall has become bigger than the white wall and we must knock down the white wall.”<sup>133</sup> Indeed, for the remaining history of colonialism in the West Indies, religious actors were some of the most fervent opponents of imperialism and white supremacy. However, it seems that very few religious revivalists reconsidered their negative evaluation of Obeah during the nineteenth century. Long legislation against Obeah, its place in the popular imagination as greedy and evil, and early religious revivalist denunciations of Obeah had simply created too much momentum against Obeah for it to be undone quickly. Thus, despite their many differences with and often direct opposition to imperialists, religious revivalists continued to agree with colonial authorities that Obeah needed to be stamped out before the West Indies could truly progress.

## **Conclusion**

Arguments over whether the West Indies should have had representative government after the Morant Bay rebellion thus included a wide range of political stances. Staunch conservative colonialists on one end of the spectrum favored crown rule and argued that West Indians were not civilized enough for representation. Imperial reformers, moderates on the political spectrum, argued that, while the influence of British colonialism, especially religious values, was still needed, West Indians were more than capable of and ready for representative

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<sup>132</sup> Paton, “Obeah in the Post-Emancipation Era,” 151-153.

<sup>133</sup> Post, *Arise Ye Starvelings*, 7.

government. Religious revivalists, on the other end of the spectrum, were the foremost opponents of imperialism and advocates for independent representative government. Despite these widely dispersed political stances, those who publically argued for or against representative government in the West Indies agreed that Obeah should be eliminated. They agreed with this statement whether they feared or mocked Obeah, whether they believed in its supernatural power or not, and whether they considered Christianity superior or equal to African religions.

These arguments truly depict how, despite differing political premises and outcomes, colonial and anticolonial forces sometimes shared opinions on severely marginalized groups. Indeed, legislation against Obeah continues to this day. Although generally no longer enforced, many laws across the West Indies still criminalize Obeah, including the Jamaican Obeah Law of 1898. These laws only exhibit minor amendments since their original creation.<sup>134</sup> Much of this is due to a postcolonial legacy that continues to uncritically accept many colonial legal structures and ideas, including scholarship like Bell's done during the late nineteenth century.<sup>135</sup> Obeah also likely remains illegal because of continued religious opposition to Obeah by Christians like the imperial reformers, and those in religious revivalist traditions, many of which are now deeply divided on how Obeah should be conceptualized.<sup>136</sup> The roots of these modern preoccupations can be seen in the representative government debates of 1865-1900. In this way, arguments concerning the political legitimacy of Obeah during this time period represent an important transitional point between colonialism and post colonialism.

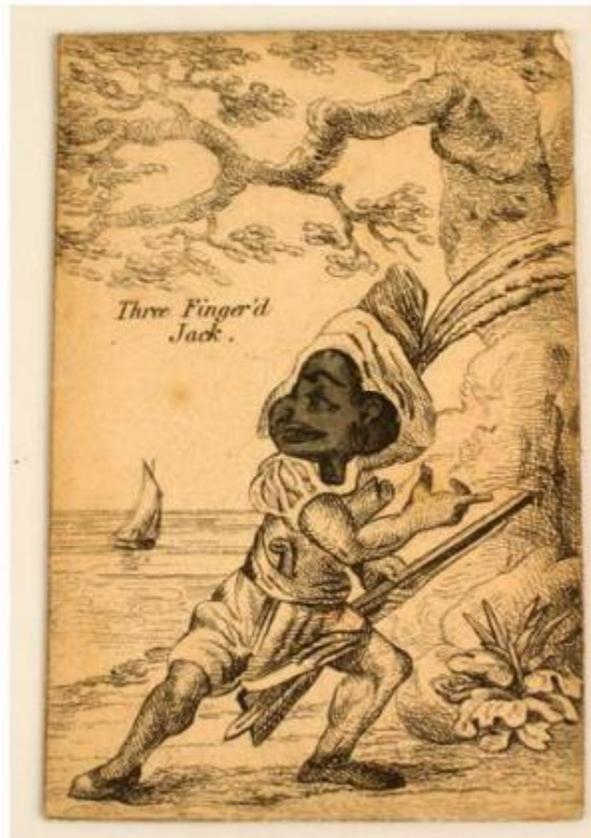
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<sup>134</sup> Erna Brodber, "Foreword," *Obeah and Other Powers: The Politics of Caribbean Religion and Healing*, edited by Diana Paton and Maarit Forde, ix – xii (Durham & London: Duke University Press, 2012): x.

<sup>135</sup> Handler and Bilby, *Enacting Power*, "Conclusion."

<sup>136</sup> See any of Bilby's works or arguments about Obeah.

Appendix I



*Three Finger'd Jack, playing card, cardboard, 6 x 9.5 cm, dated 1750-1800, The New-York Historical Society Museum and Library. Image courtesy of The New-York Historical Society Museum and Library <http://www.nyhistory.org/> via Diana Paton at <http://obeahhistories.org/three-fingered-jack/>.*

### Timeline of Events

**1760-** *Jamaican Act to Remedy the Evils arising from Irregular Assemblies of Slaves* passed following Tacky's Revolt

**1800-** Moseley publishes *A Treatise on Sugar*, popularizing the image of Three Fingered Jack

**1804-** The Haitian Revolution succeeds, Haiti is liberated from French colonialism

**1831-32-** The Baptist War or Christmas Rebellion of 1831, an influential Jamaican slave revolt led by Native Baptists

**1833, August 28-** Slavery Abolition Act passed in Great Britain

**1834, August 1-** Slavery formally abolished in Jamaica under the Slavery Abolition Act, beginning a period of "apprenticeship" for ex-slaves

**1838, August 1-** "Full freedom" of slaves in the West Indies, ending "apprenticeship" period

**1840s-60s-** The "Myal Outbreak"

**1864-** *Affaire de Bizoton*, the Haitian legal case after which claims of cannibalism were based

**1865, October-** Morant Bay Rebellion

**1866-** Governor Eyre and House of Assembly abolished, Crown rule imposed

**1884-** Representation and limited self-rule is gradually reintroduced to Jamaica  
Spenser publishes *Hayti, or the Black Republic*

**1888-** Froude publishes *The English in the West Indies*

Salmon's response *The Caribbean Confederation*

Darnell Davis's response *Mr. Froude's Negrophobia, or Don Quixote as a Cook's Tourist*

**1889-** Thomas publishes his response to Froude, *Froudacity*

Bell publishes *Obeah: Witchcraft in the West Indies*

**1898-** *The Obeah Law, 1898* passed in Jamaica

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