

# [The self liberation passive resistance and active resistance history essay](https://assignbuster.com/the-self-liberation-passive-resistance-and-active-resistance-history-essay/)

The earliest form of forced labour in the West Indies was the encomienda which utilized the Neo-Indian people and resulted in the near decimation of their entire population. This was followed by the system of white indentured labour which brought immigrants from Ireland, England and Wales. This did not last very long because of the fact that the Europeans were not accustomed to the tropical climate of the West Indies and did not survive in such harsh working conditions. This was then followed by African enslavement which brought millions of people from the coast of West Africa

From the outset one notes that systems of slavery existed and predated their imposition in the Caribbean region. There were different concepts as to the duties and responsibilities of both ‘ slave’ and ‘ master’- concept of slavery always present in almost every recorded human civilisation ( e. g. Greece, Rome, China, Russia, Saudi Arabia, India, Africa ) but each differing from the other.

In the British West Indies the slavery system was referred to as Chattel Slavery. This was a system whereby the slaves and their offspring were enslaved during their lifetime and were the sole property of the owner. The slaves were be bought and sold as commodities. This therefore meant that conditions were very inhumane and psychologically destructive to any human being. From the 16th Century until Emancipation in 1834 this form of slavery was made legal and supported by the British government and was implemented in their colonies.

The causes for the Emancipation of slaves in the British West Indies can be interpreted in many different ways with Self Liberation (Resistance and Revolts) being at the forefront, the changing Economic climate in England at the time and The Abolitionist Movement. Each of these played an important role in the Emancipation of slavery but it was the incessant revolts which impacted the most and in the process gained recognition from entire the British population.

1. 0 Self-Liberation-Passive Resistance and Active Resistance

From the inception of African slavery there have been records of many forms of resistance. From the time of capture to the plantation there were forms of resistance by the African slaves. The slaves did not passively accepted slavery and it conditions. It showed that they were determined to fight for their freedom no matter what the cost was. Almost every year there was some form of revolts on the plantation in individually or in groups. There were many daily disruptions the by the slaves as forms of protest and resistance. Slave Resistance can be looked in two ways.

Passive Resistance which includes the following:

Running Away

Most Significant form of non-violent resistance.

Easy to do (Physically)

A destination however was needed (Sometimes not to be found).

Jamaica, Trinidad, St. Vincent, and Guyana were good territories to run away in.

The Maroons were runaways who stayed runaways. They set up their own communities apart from the plantation society. The Jamaica Maroons fought two major wars with the British and won which forced the granting of their freedom with a signed treaty. In the treaty they agreed to return all runaways to their masters.

Many resources were spent by the plantation owners to catch the runaway slaves. They therefore had to discourage others from trying to do it. It contained many risks trying to recapture runaway slaves.

Starvation

Slaves starved themselves to death.

To lessen their workload.

This resulted in a decline of production in the plantation and also caused the owner to lose money if the slave died.

Faking Illnesses

Not being able to work.

Most instances the master did not care but in instances where he thought it was contagious the slave would get rest.

Again this disrupted the daily activities in production and the slave still had to be fed.

Go Slow

This was difficult to succeed.

Most times there was a potential for the slave to be whipped.

It was high risk to the slaves.

In a way the slaves took risks of being punished at the same time trying to form resistances against being enslaved.

Sabotage

Damage equipment in the factory.

Burn sugar cane crop.

Kill Animals

This was all extremely dangerous but was accomplished. It was highly effective because it resulted in the owner losing money making production of the crop to decline. They were times slaves were put to death if found out.

Cultural Retention

A vested interest by the slave masters was to take away their culture resulted in dehumanizing the slaves. A practice of drumming which the slaves was an important activity in African culture and religion. It was as type of identity for the slaves. However some of the slaves still practiced it.

In removing culture and religion of the slaves, other cultures developed such as a mixture of the African religion with Christianity. By doing this it showed a form of resistance by the slaves.

In doing so the slaves maintained form of communication unknown to the masters which enabled their revolts to be started.

Educating Oneself

It was felt to be most dangerous if slaves were able to read and understand what was communicated by the masters.

Being knowledgeable was considered to be dangerous to the slave master because other slaves could be educated as well.

By being knowledgeable the other slaves would be informed of what is taking place such as the news of the Haitian Revolt by slaves.

Most slave societies had laws banning teaching slaves to read and write.

Active Resistance which includes the following:

Suicide

Slaves killed themselves rather than have to live in such horrible conditions. This resulted in the slave masters to lose money on their investment. .

Infanticide

Even though the women protected their children they were prepared to save these children from the life they lived and had endured. This meant killing their infant instead of them being born as slaves.

Poisoning

Most revolts were started by women slaves who tried to poison their masters.

Many slave women had knowledge of poisonous plants and used it against the owners.

It was always on the minds of owners being poisoned by slave women who cooked for them.

Open Revolt and Rebellion

It must be noted that the only successful slave revolt was in Haiti in 1804. However many revolts were attempted in the British West Indies. The slave owners controlled how things were done in the plantation the way of life of the slaves but they could never have controlled the minds of the enslaved individual who only thought was freedom.

The Major Revolts in the British West Indies

Barbados Rebellion in 1816

In 1816 a major rebellion broke out led by an African born slave Bussa. It was spread across one third of the island and included seventy plantations. It was properly organized by the slaves wanting their freedom and a better way of life. By the time the revolt was over a quarter of the sugar cane crop was lost. It resulted in the execution of 214 slaves and the displacement of others who were sold off or shipped out. However it did accomplished a tremendous loss of income to the plantation owners.

The Demerara Rebellion in 1823

With sugar prices down slaves were pushed harder in the sugar cane fields so as to increase the production levels. This resulted in a major rebellion in 1823 in Demerara organized by Quamina and Smith. It involved about 9000 slaves. It resulted in the death and injury of many enslaved people. It must be noted that no plantation owners or their families were hurt as in previous rebellion.

The Jamaica Rebellion in 1831

The island on Jamaica had a numerous rebellions a total of 16 from 1655 to 1813. However the largest one took place in 1831. It started when enslaved people demanded payment for the work been done. It was led by Samuel Sharpe and it involved 20, 000 slaves who took control of over 200 estates and seized a vast amount of land. It was eventually controlled resulting in the loss of live of 200 slaves and 14 British planters. This rebellion lasted several months and took the effort of the British troops and local militia to suppress it. The impact of this rebellion made the British realised the dangers and cost of continuing slavery because this rebellion dealt a very severe blow to the economic value of the plantation system in Jamaica.

Thus it can be seen the main reason more and more historians are holding firm of the view that the slaves were themselves responsible for their own freedom. The slave population had vastly outnumbered the Europeans at that time. In number there is strength and the slaves were not going to tolerate being enslaved and dehumanized without putting up a fight. Most important the plantation owners had begun living a life of fear by the high number of revolts which placed their lives in danger even though more slaves died during and after any rebellion than whites. Therefore the threat of more rebellion caused the British to change its position of continuing slavery and whether it was economically viable enough to continue with the plantation system.

2. 0 The Change in Economic Policies in England

Nearing the end of the 18th century the profitability of the plantation and the system of slavery was in decline. This in a way contributed to the abolition of the slave trade in 1807 which was no longer profitable. The Industrial Revolution had started in England at this time and the economy was moving to a capitalist system. Britain no longer needed good that had been produced under the plantation system and which had to be heavily subsidized by the government Factories in Manchester had begun producing and employing thousands of workers producing goods like cotton which was in heavy demand and very profitable. This rapid growth of Industrialization required huge capital and money from the slavery made was now invested heavily in new factories instead of supporting a now non profitable plantation system.

Sugar from the British West Indies could not be sold on the open market in England for a profit and as a result warehouses were overstocked. This was because of the open market system which allowed sugar to be purchased from the cheapest source such as Cuba and Brazil. At the same time too France was producing beet sugar which was cheaper and of a high quality too. Previously the British had imposed heavy taxes on sugar not produced by the British plantation. In this capitalist environment it was difficult for the government to have continued with a socialist economy.

In addition the constant threat of revolts by the slaves made the situation worse for the planters. The revolts which occurred resulted in loss of valuable properties such as factories and white human lives. They the plantation system were no longer important to the thriving economic progress which took place in England . The new manufactures and now middle class no longer felt obligated to support a system which no longer brought in a huge sum of money. This resulted in the plantation owners to lose whatever allies and support they had at home.

3. 0 The Church, the Abolitionist Movement and Reformation in Government

During this period the British experienced had a rebirth in their Christian faith and the thinking of every man being a brother of another. Therefore slavery was now thought of as being very un-Christian and resulted in the Church joining the Abolitionist movement to end slavery. This caused the Church to become actively involved in the emancipation process.

The Abolitionist wanted to see the end of slavery as soon as possible and now had tremendous power in parliament with a two-third majority. The plantation now had no lobbying power in parliament. Their campaign included prominent figures such as William Wilberforce who was an MP in parliament and Thomas Buxton who succeeded him. There were also radical figures as Thomas Clarkson whose group mounted tremendous pressures on the British parliament and government. This campaign led to the passage of the Emancipation Act in 1833 and which became law on 1st August 1834.

The white working class in cities such as Manchester had begun to get signed petition to end slavery. They began a campaign which soon spread rapidly joining with the Abolitionist movement. In a way these humanitarians efforts did in a way hasten the emancipation process. The average working class citizens had begun to realize that the African slaves were their brothers and started to adopt a more humane stance.

It must be noted that the plantation owners were given a grant of 20 million which for compensation for the loss of property and for ending slavery. This helped to enable the plantation owners to keep their properties and control of power intact. The African slaves got absolutely nothing except their so called freedom. The now freed slaves had no money or land to survive making the process of actually having to survive extremely difficult.

Conclusion