

Chapter 1

Natural History = National History:

Early Origins and Organizing Principles of Museums in the English-speaking Caribbean

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The eighteenth- and nineteenth-century British model of the museum was transported and applied, not merely to the West Indies but to Canada, Australia and New Zealand and the Pacific Islands; to Asia, and African territories (most particularly South Africa and the former Rhodesia, now Zimbabwe) - in other words, throughout the British Empire. This model, embodying the eighteenth-century Enlightenment concern with scientific observation, documentation and presentation of the accumulating knowledge emanating from nineteenth-century tropical environments, was designed largely to improve the Empire's economy, and to encourage emigration to these regions by highlighting the natural assets that might be exploited on its behalf. This model of the museum never accommodated notions of a 'national' history as having any validity.

The overriding concern with assembling new knowledge was directly related to the imperial government's need to control and exploit these new natural resources - including human resources. This led to the employment of methods of categorization and classification within both the early written and later the exhibited histories of the region. A final factor was the very long 'memory' of these 'scientific' considerations: this influenced the collecting, exhibiting and interpretation of new knowledge until well past the mid-twentieth century, when newly independent nations began to assemble and present their own authoritative narratives in modern museum institutions as part of the process of identity construction.

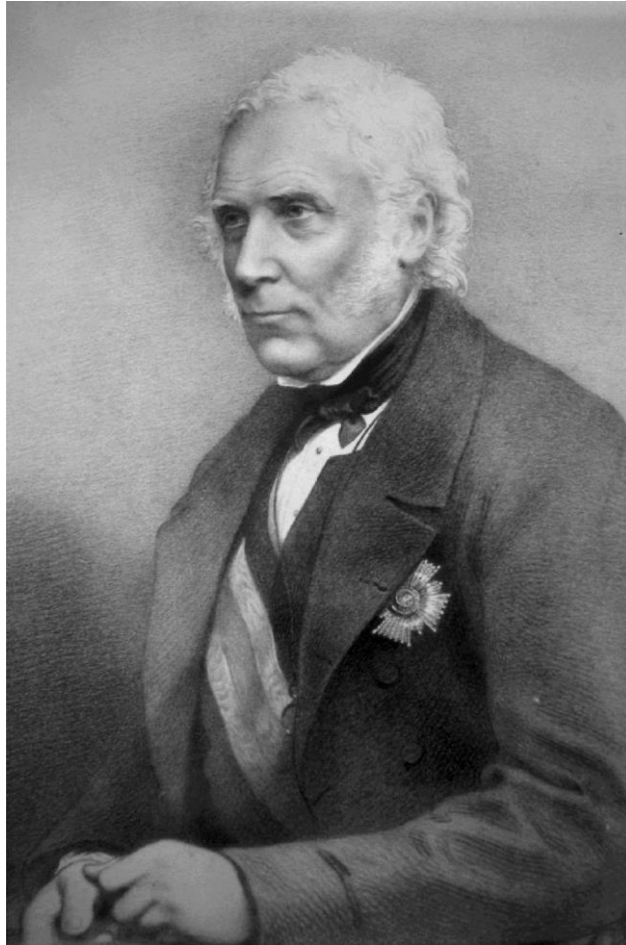
The Civilizing Mission

Within less than a decade of Emancipation and the end of Apprenticeship during the 1830s and 1840s, throughout the British Empire the rise of an active British humanitarian movement sought to improve the conditions of indigenous people, although such efforts were not necessarily extended so generously to recently emancipated populations. Nevertheless, there was a critical need to establish a new mechanism to accommodate differing working and social conditions, requirements and status, which would transform the lives of colonial citizens and inhabitants from then on. The movement achieved many successes, including the abolition of slavery in British colonies. In Britain, the Cape, the Caribbean and Australasia there were vocal, powerful people, both inside and outside government, who urged recognition that terrible injustices, against the non-European peoples whose lands they now inhabited, had been carried out in the name of the British Crown. Somewhere between these two perspectives, the energies, interests and zeal of colonial administrators who, in the absence of formal policy, effectively 'ran the British Empire', applied their own theories and designs,¹ and created a context within which the utilization of museums as a tool to address these realities rapidly evolved.

Arriving in 1839 in the recently-emancipated Atlantic territories as Bermuda's newly-appointed Governor (later Governor of Barbados and the Windward Islands), with a mandate to improve the deplorable condition of the colony's agriculture, Lieutenant Colonel (later Sir William) Reid found that the project required meticulous identification, categorization, promotion and transportation of colonial products to supply the needs both of the Empire's population and of its trading partners.² The necessary institutional bases from which to collate and compile the data were required, so he created these with legislation to establish a public library and museum in the colony, predicated

¹ In her article "Sir William Reid, F.R.S., 1791-1858: Governor of Bermuda, Barbados and Malta," *Notes and Records of the Royal Society*, Vol. 40, #2, 1986, pp. 169-193. Olwyn Blouet has noted that 'Helen Taft Manning has argued that for the period 1830-1850 that no one man or group of men "ran the British Empire" and has suggested that attention be directed to colonial governors who: "applied their own theories of government ... were too far away and too much the source of all the information reaching England to make any effective supervision of their actions or policies possible". It therefore mattered who was appointed to governorships. The backgrounds, interests, skills and general characteristics of governors were important variables in colonial policy.' p. 170

² Richard Drayton, *Nature's Government: Science, Imperial Britain, and the 'Improvement' of the World*, New Haven and London, 2000, p. 62.



Lieut. Colonel (later Sir) William Reid, the 'Good Governor'
(Courtesy of The Bermudian)

on the imperial government's desire to ensure control over a properly subjugated territory.³ Remembered as Bermuda's 'Good Governor', Reid, a product of the Scottish Enlightenment who shared the Enlightenment conviction of the inevitability and desirability of material progress and improvement, epitomized the 'improving' British imperialism that emerged at the end of the eighteenth century, a new species of governance based on 'the idea that colonization was an enterprise of amelioration' and a firm 'faith in its capacity and right to increase the happiness of barbarians'.⁴ His primary motivation was the 'securing of the loyal support of the people ... through their own self-interest, by enabling them to prosper under British rule'. By 1846, when he was appointed Governor of Barbados and the Windward Islands, Reid had initiated the promulgation of

³ See Alissandra Cummins, 'The "Caribbeanization" of the West Indies: the Museum's Role in the Development of National Identity', in *Museums and the Making of "Ourselves": the Role of Objects in National Identity*, Flora Kaplan (ed.), London and New York, 1994, p. 194. See also Cummins, 'Confronting Colonialism: the First 60 Years at the BMHS', *Journal of the Barbados Museum & Historical Society*, Vol. XLII, 1994-1995, p. 2.

⁴ Drayton, *Nature's Government*, pp. 92-93.

similar bills to develop these institutions in Barbados, Grenada and Saint Lucia in the late 1840s.⁵

Richard Drayton has noted that 'Agriculture was the cause which tended to precede other kinds of cultural initiative. The improvement of agriculture was the most important stimulus for the empire's gentlemen when they came to constitute ... learned societies.'⁶ Scientific research into the region's agriculture was clearly oriented by international interests, whereby these resources were identified for economic exploitation for the empire's benefit.⁷ Agricultural societies were created within the region to respond to these requirements; their activities spawned major elements of early museums in assembling the research resources required. Reid extended his philanthropic efforts at comprehensive social improvement through public libraries and museums as principal vehicles for educational reform. He recognized that access to ideas and information was important for development, and also viewed education as helping to ease the transition from a slave society to a free society. He hoped that 'instruction would soften the 'distinctions' within society. Others of the region's earliest museums, first established within a decade of Emancipation, provided little reflection of this transformation in the colony's social landscape, and were driven instead by the need of both mercantilist and planter interests to establish new generators of prosperity and wealth after the social and economic structure founded on slave labour had been dismantled.

Reid's first colonial appointment as Governor of Bermuda (1839-1846) enabled him to initiate 'progressive' policies in agriculture, public works and education, which then were incorporated in the foundation for the region's first libraries and museums. He then reinforced this connection when he moved to Barbados (1846-1848).⁸ Reid was a popular governor and he had his admirers in the Colonial Office as well. James Stephen, the Permanent Undersecretary of State for the Colonies, called Reid 'one of the ablest men in the colonial service', and was particularly impressed by his 'extensive knowledge ... unbounded curiosity ... and mental activity'. Within a few months of his return to London

⁵ I have noted the development of similar legislation in 'Caribbeanization', p. 194. Essentially the legislation enacted called for 'a public library [to] be established and kept in ... the city of Bridgetown ... and that a public museum be in like manner established and maintained in the same place', specifying the designation as 'The Barbados Library and Museum', 'containing a collection of books of reference and practical works, with a museum of natural and scientific subjects, and productions of art, would be beneficial to the community...', 'and providing for its free use by all residents in Barbados, whether civil, military or naval. The governing body of this institution was to consist of 'five fit and proper' persons nominated by the Governor.

⁶ Drayton, *Nature's Government*, pp. 63-64. Amongst those listed were the Society for the Encouragement of Natural History and Useful Arts of Barbados (1784) and the Physico-Medical Society of Grenada (1791).

⁷ Essentially, the Society of Arts' initiatives in which scientific agriculture served the mercantile interests of empire through the planting of commodities traditionally purchased through Dutch, French, and Spanish intermediaries from Asia and Africa. The Society's encouragement of the establishment of botanical gardens in the West Indies logically extended a century later into the creation of agricultural and scientific societies.

⁸ Reid was later made governor of Malta (1851-1858) where he similarly established the island's first major museum. In other words he served sixteen years as a governor and museum developer. His enlightened policies even found their way into an article that appeared in Charles Dicken's 'Household Words'.

from Barbados he was named a Vice President of the Royal Society,⁹ and his reputation for effective management and organization was partly responsible for his appointment as chairman of the executive committee of the Great Exhibition early in 1850. What has not been recognized or acknowledged to date is the way in which he then applied the knowledge gained by his experiences in the West Indies to his next mandate, as executive manager of the Great Exhibition of 1851. The exhibition opened to huge success on 1 May 1851, largely as a result of Reid's excellent management, and his 'tranquil energy and determination'.¹⁰ Reid was from the start an energetic and innovative administrator. As Olwyn Blouet has suggested, 'For Reid the diffusion of useful knowledge throughout the colonies was an essential ingredient of imperial policy as he saw it.'¹¹

West Indian collections and museums were thus created by commercial (and at the same time political) leaders as early promotional campaigns designed to attract new audiences within the colonies, as well as new clients and investors from the metropole. It was an advantageous marriage between private enterprise and imperial interests, where the major beneficiaries were, intentionally, the white minority, whether local or foreign, as these private Agricultural Societies, established on exclusive membership structures, sought to shore up a way of life widely regarded as under threat.

Many early regional institutions were founded on the basis of donated natural history and geological collections assembled in the preparation of systematic surveys of the islands. Duplicate specimen collections assembled variously for the Royal Botanic Gardens Kew, and to a lesser extent the British Museum, also provided the impetus for developing or expanding local collections. Between the 1840s and 1870s private arts and scientific societies rapidly proliferated throughout the region. An exchange of correspondence in 1859 between Richard Hill and Charles Darwin about indigenous bees in Jamaica, revealed the existence of a similar entity in Spanish Town. Hill observed "We have a log in the Museum of our Society of Arts containing a living hive at work, and if I do not possess myself of what you desire early, I shall be able from this stock to get for you Specimens..." In British Guiana (now Guyana) the collections of the Royal Agricultural and Commercial Society (RACS, 1844) and the Natural History Society of British Guiana (1861) were utilized to establish a local exhibition to bring to light 'these hidden sources of wealth and stimulants to industry'. The exhibition organisers had a larger goal:

... but because the interest it excites can be evanescent, we desire to connect with it the project of a permanent local museum, to which not merely strangers can have recourse for a general view of what our country offers to the research of scientific and intelligent curiosity but where the resident may at his leisure, review and extend his store of

⁹ Reid was elected a Fellow of the Royal Society in 1839 based on his scientific research.

¹⁰ The first world's fair in history, a display of science, technology and the arts that clearly demonstrated Britain's industrial lead at the mid-century, the Great Exhibition involved over 70 countries and territories creating exhibits at the Crystal Palace. As the initial global exposition the Great Exhibition set the standard for the rest that followed. Much of the success of this model can be ascribed to Reid's capacities, vision and experience.

He was knighted in September 1851 as a result of his many contributions.

¹¹ Blouet 1986, p. 171.

knowledge and by experiment and induction contribute to those of mankind at large.¹²

Fire threatened this ambitious endeavour in 1864, however, by 1867 shares were on sale at £10 each to assist with establishing the British Guiana Museum Company Limited. This initiative received great public support and by 13 February 1868 the doors had opened on the newly constructed 'permanent home of science, art and industry',¹³ which later became the Guyana National Museum.¹⁴

Thus, in common with many similar institutions throughout Britain's colonies, early museums in the region primarily collected and displayed natural history and 'curiosities'. Donald Fleming has posited that:

The study of natural history] was a fundamental part of the quest for a *national identity* [my emphasis] in societies where the cultural differentiation from Britain was insecure and the sense of the land correspondingly important for self-awareness.¹⁵

Stimulated no doubt by the 1890 Trinidad and Tobago Exhibition of Agriculture, Floriculture, Horticulture, Manufactures, Science and Art, The Trinidad Society of Arts and Sciences, (established in 1870), joined the Trinidad Field Naturalists Club in 1892 spearheading the creation of the Royal Victoria Institute (originally named the Victoria Institute), modeled along the lines of the Victoria and Albert Museum.¹⁶ It was built as a Science and Art Museum to commemorate the Diamond Jubilee of Queen Victoria. The building, still in its original form, was designed in the German Renaissance style by architect Daniel Mienerts Hahn who worked in the Department of Public Works. It opened on 17 September 1902, when the public could see microscopic exhibits for the first time. In a 1908 address by the Institute's President Prof. J Carmody, while the focus was very much on the modernist objective of technical and vocational education, he reminded that "There was another question which they had not lost sight of, and that was the establishment of a commercial museum, that persons coming to the Colony could see what articles were produced here, and what they could introduce with success".¹⁷ Governor Sir Alfred Moloney later responded that he himself was "perfectly in sympathy with the desire to see a museum added to that institution, and, so far as he could afford, he would be delighted to give his support by contributing himself, or from the funds of the Colony".¹⁸

The General Agricultural Society in Jamaica was one of the founding agencies of the Royal Society of Arts and Agriculture (1864).¹⁹ This society 'for the augmentation of the sources of public industry and the extension of the arts and manufactures of the colony' was supported by voluntary subscriptions. Specimens collected between 1860 to 1866 by the Sawkins and Brown

¹² Opening address of the Lieut. Governor in the *Proceedings of the Natural History Society of British Guiana*, Georgetown, British Guiana, 1863, nn.

¹³ *The Colonist* newspaper, 13 February 1868, cited in Arlene Munro, 'A short history of the National Museum', *Stabroek News*, February 2004, nn.

¹⁴ See Caribbeanization, pp. 196-197.

¹⁵ D. Fleming, 'Science in Australia, Canada, and the United States: Some Comparative Remarks', *Actes du Dixième Congrès International d'Histoire des Sciences*, Paris, 1962, pp. 179-81. Quoted in Sheets-Pyenson, *Cathedrals of Science*, p. 15.

¹⁶ See Cummins, 'Caribbeanization', p. 198.

¹⁷ Victoria Institute, *Industrial Trinidad*, p. 512.

¹⁸ *Industrial Trinidad*, p. 514.

¹⁹ See further details in 'Museums of Jamaica' by Frederick Le Mercier du Quesnay, 1965.

Geological Survey²⁰ were combined with the newly established Public Library (opened in 1874), and eventually became the nucleus of the Institute of Jamaica (IOJ) in 1879.²¹ The Institute of Jamaica was constituted to:

Maintain a library, reading room, and museum, to provide for the reading of papers, the delivery of lectures, and the holding of examinations on subjects connected with literature, science and art, to award premiums for the application of scientific and artistic methods to local industries, and to provide for the holding of exhibitions illustrating Jamaican industries.²²

J.A. Froude later recorded his 1886 visit to the Institute in more casual terms:

[The senior aide-de-camp]... drove me one morning into Kingston. ...There were libraries, museums, public offices, and such like to be seen, besides the town itself... We saw the museum and public library. There were the usual specimens of island antiquities—of local fish, birds, insects, reptiles, plants, geological formations, and such like. In the library were old editions of curious books at [sic] the West Indies, some of them unique, ready to yield ampler pictures of the romance of the old life there than we at present possess. I had but leisure to glance at title-pages and engravings. The most noticeable relic preserved there, if it be only genuine, is the identical bauble which Cromwell ordered to be taken away from the Speaker's table in the House of Commons. Explanations are given of the manner in which it came to Jamaica. The evidence, so far as I could understand it, did not appear conclusive.²³

However, unlike his critical assessment of museum institutions in Australasia, only the latter artefact appeared to have excited his interest. Those examining these institutions in later years would take special pains to 'emphasize the conjunction of practical and economic aims with [the] scientific and artistic in the history of the successive bodies and their establishing Laws'. These entities were all part of a 'collecting' economy with extensive links to mother institutions in Britain (and sister institutions in the United States and elsewhere) that existed within a system of international trade in objects and specimens. This resulted in the ongoing export of objects, where, as the original research and collecting organizations of the region, they essentially controlled or coordinated the manner and means of illustrating the natural history and indigenous and later enslaved, peoples of these territories, essentially placing these at an equivalent level.

The General Agricultural Society in Barbados, like others in the West Indies, established a committee 'for the purpose of devising how Barbados might contribute to the exhibition of industry of all nations in London'.²⁴ In British Guiana the committee of correspondence of the RACS responded to the news of the Paris exhibition of 1855, and others subsequently planned for Dublin and New York, by proposing to raise local interest through holding exhibitions and collecting contributions to support these activities. The Society later recommended to the Governor and the Courts of Policy of the colony that it was

²⁰ See Francis Bather, Special Report on the Institute of Jamaica for the Encouragement of Literature, Sciences, and Arts, May, 1934 (NLJ MS73), p. 1.

²¹ See Cummins, 'Caribbeanization', p. 197.

²² Bather, p. 2.

²³ James Anthony Froude, *The English in the West Indies, or, The Bow of Ulysses*, London, 1888, ps. 190 and 192.

²⁴ *Barbados Globe*, 4 October 1850.

highly desirable to make a renewed effort for the establishment of a museum in Georgetown and in connection with that object and also with reference to the probable holding of a Great Exhibition in London in the year 1861...that it is very important to hold an exhibition...²⁵

West Indian communities expedited initiatives that extended well beyond a simple display of samples, and were inspired to create large-scale national exhibitions, for example in British Guiana (1855) and Trinidad (1858).²⁶

The 'Sinews of Commerce'²⁷

Displays at the Colonial and Indian Exhibition of 1886 illustrating the vast wealth in natural products, and the commercial, industrial, artistic and educational achievements of the various colonies and of India, excited great interest throughout the British Empire. His Royal Highness the Prince of Wales suggested that a permanent institution...designed to afford a thorough and living representation of the progress made in the development of their resources',²⁸ and elaborated on a scale commensurate with the importance of their relations to the prosperity of the Empire, might constitute a fitting 'national memorial commemorative of the fiftieth year of the reign of Her Majesty, an epoch within which some of our most important and thriving Colonies passed from insignificance and even comparative barbarism to exalted positions in the commercial and civilized world.'²⁹

His suggestion prompted the establishment of an Imperial Institute designed not only to illustrate the industrial and commercial resources of Britain's colonies and India but also

²⁵ *Report of the Committee of Correspondence of the Royal Agricultural and Commercial Society*, 1857-1861, Georgetown, British Guiana, 1861.

²⁶ These activities reached their zenith in 1891 when Jamaica 'welcomed the world' to its own Great Exhibition, Trinidad and Tobago having hosted a more modest national endeavour the year before in 1890.

²⁷ The Colonies, and the Indian Empire, cannot fail to be greatly benefited by being thoroughly represented in a well-selected and carefully organised assemblage of illustrations of the sources of prosperity which constitute the sinews of their commerce, the continuous exploration and cultivation of which are vital to the maintenance of the influence of each section of the Empire upon industrial and social progress., *Imperial Institute*, p. 44.

²⁸ *The Imperial Institute of the United Kingdom, the colonies, and India*, published by the Imperial Institute, London, 1892, p. 13.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, For the West Indies, the experience which had been developing over the decades following the Great Exhibition meant that the Colonial and Indian Exhibition allowed them far more favourable and meaningful representation in terms of exhibits than the preceding international exhibitions. J.A. Froude in his *The English in the West Indies* (1888) reported that 'The West Indians who had come over for the Colonial Exhibition were most of them already gone. They, along with the rest, had taken back with them a consciousness that their visit had not been wholly in vain, and that the interest of the old country in her distant possessions seemed quickening into life once more. The commissioners from all our dependencies had been feted in the great towns, and the people had come to Kensington in millions to admire the productions which bore witness to the boundless resources of British territory ... The Exhibition had served the purpose which it was intended for. The conference of delegates grew out of it which has discussed in the happiest temper the elements of our future relations.' [pp. 13-16]

to diffuse a knowledge of their condition and continued progress throughout the United Kingdom,[and] also to afford to all classes of Her Majesty's subjects opportunities of becoming acquainted with the development, during the Queen's reign, and with the further extension from time to time, of the resources, natural, industrial, and commercial, of the United Kingdom itself, and, by actively promoting technical and higher commercial education, to advance the industrial and commercial prosperity of the country.³⁰

There could be no more suitable memorial than an Institute that could represent the Arts, Manufactures, and Commerce of the Empire. Such an institution would illustrate the progress already made during Her Majesty's reign in the Colonial and Indian Dominions, while 'it would record year by year the development of the Empire in the Arts of Civilization'.³¹ It was believed that these exhibits would be deeply interesting to Her Majesty's subjects, both within and beyond Great Britain. They were expected to help 'stimulate Emigration to those British territories where it is required, to expand the Trade between the different British Communities, and to draw closer the bonds which unite the Empire. It would be at once a Museum, an Exhibition, and the proper locality for the discussion of Colonial and Indian subjects'.³²

By the time this formal exchange of communication was in train, financial arrangements were already being made by several of the colonies for establishing the collections to be displayed, and providing for their guardianship and annual maintenance.³³ By early 1887 the objectives of the Institute were being publicly disseminated by the extensive distribution, throughout the British Empire, of brief summaries of its main objectives, and also an address delivered at the Royal Institute on 22 April 1887 by Sir Frederick Abel, the President of the Institute,³⁴ before His Royal Highness the Prince of Wales and a 'numerous' audience on 'The Work of the Imperial Institute'. He indicated that the Institute's approach was to 'combine in some harmonious form a broader and more enduring representation of your Majesty's Colonies and India as well as of the United Kingdom'. His hope was 'that this Institute may hereafter not only exhibit the material resources of the Empire', but would also 'promote the commercial and industrial prosperity of all parts of your Majesty's dominions, and that the scientific and technical education which the requirements of modern industry render necessary may, through its means, receive fresh development'.³⁵

³⁰ Ibid, p. 14.

³¹ Letter of H.R.H. the Prince of Wales, to the then Lord Mayor, Sir John Staples, K.C.M.G, 13th of September, 1886, quoted in *Imperial Institute*, p. 14.

³² Ibid, p. 14.

³³ Records indicate that 'Satisfactory communications had already by this date been received from India, several of the Canadian provinces, New South Wales, Victoria, Queensland, Tasmania, Cape Colony, Natal, the West India Settlements, and the East African Protectorates, as to their willingness to prepare and maintain adequate collections of their commercial and economic products. The arrangements for providing and maintaining collections illustrating the resources of the Indian Empire were already in operation.'

³⁴ Abel was not only the Institute's president but was also chair of the Organising Committee appointed to advise upon the form and constitution of the memorial of the fiftieth anniversary of Queen Victoria's accession to the throne.

³⁵ Address presented to Her Majesty Queen Victoria by the President of the Organising Committee of the Imperial Institute, in *Imperial Institute*, p. 20. He continued: This foundation," or "corner-stone" - as our Transatlantic brethren prefer to name it - is a

Abel went further, asserting that the Great Exhibition of 1851 'gave a vast impulse to commercial activity, and set an example which has been often, followed in the countries both of the old and of the new worlds'.³⁶ The creation of an Imperial Institute was therefore seen as a fitting development and completion of the work of that 'great and bold' enterprise whose financial success was expected to be emulated.³⁷

In response Queen Victoria replied:

I concur with you in thinking that the counsels and exertions of my beloved husband initiated a movement which gave increased vigour to commercial activity, and produced marked and lasting improvements in industrial efforts. One indirect result of that movement has been to bring more before the minds of men the vast and varied resources of the Empire, over which Providence has willed that I should reign during 50 prosperous years. I believe and hope that the Imperial Institute will play a useful part in combining those resources for the common advantage of all my subjects, and in conducing towards the welding of the Colonies, India and the Mother Country into one harmonious and united community.³⁸

The Institute did accept the proposition that the memorial should not 'be merely personal in its character', but should tend 'to serve the interests of the entire Empire', and to 'promote a feeling of unity among the whole of Her Majesty's subjects'.³⁹ On 12 May 1888 Her Majesty granted a Charter of Incorporation to the 'Imperial Institute of the United Kingdom, the Colonies and India, and the Isles of the British Seas',⁴⁰ providing, amongst other things, for such a governing body as, in their opinion, would best represent Her Majesty's subjects in the United Kingdom, the Colonies and India, and the commercial and industrial interests of the Empire. Here, therefore, by the end of the nineteenth century was the culmination of Britain's organizing principle, gathering together in one place for the convenience of the Empire and its subjects all the resources necessary to control, celebrate and communicate the importance and value of the British Empire.

No time was wasted. Assistant Secretary of the Institute, Sir Somers Vine, was dispatched in late 1888 on a mission to the principal colonies where the authorities and commercial bodies in these colonies were acquainted with the objects of the Imperial Institute; their interest therein was demonstrated by

huge block of granite from Cape Colony, and stands on a pedestal of Indian bricks. The ceremony was attended by every auspicious omen, and in the interest it excited it was considered second only to that memorable ceremonial on Jubilee day, which closely preceded it.

³⁶ Ibid, p. 20. The connection in fact went much further than mere emulation of the Great Exhibition. The Organising Committee directed its attention to the property at South Kensington belonging to the Commissioners of the Exhibition of 1851, and a representation was submitted by the Committee to the Prince of Wales to the effect that the Imperial Institute might reasonably advance a claim for the grant of the same site on which the Exhibition had been held, from the land purchased with the surplus proceeds of the first International Exhibition that had been entrusted to the Royal Commissioners of that Exhibition "for application in the interests of Institutions and undertakings designed for the promotion of Science and Art".

³⁷ Ibid. p. 20.

³⁸ Ibid., p. 21.

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Ibid., p. 22.

promises of practical co-operation from all quarters.⁴¹ In Jamaica the effect was almost immediate. Local newspapers reported that

in the early days of September 1889 a body of gentlemen representative of the wealth and intelligence of Jamaica gathered in the rooms of the Chamber of Agriculture and Commerce, Duke Street, to meet Sir Somers Vine ... the representative of His Royal Highness the Prince of Wales who had been on a special mission to all the colonies on behalf of the Imperial Institute; the great memorial of the completion of fifty years of Her Majesty's reign, —which was then beginning 'to assume form' at South Kensington, London.⁴²

Following Sir Somers' delivery of an 'interesting and powerful address on the object and scope of the Imperial Institute', Governor Sir Henry Blake responded that in fact the Institute of Jamaica had been 'brooding, and was near to hatching, a scheme to get up an Exhibition of our own. He did not see why this could not be done and the exhibits sent afterwards to the Imperial Institute.'⁴³ The credit for the initial idea for such a venture went to William Fawcett,⁴⁴ Chairman of the Board of Governors of the Institute, although the Exhibition itself was the dream of native Jamaican A. G Sinclair, one of the compilers of the annual *Handbook of Jamaica*.⁴⁵

Fawcett proposed to the Board the 'holding a local exhibition in Jamaica in accordance with Section 8 of the Law of the Institute of Jamaica'. He pointed out that 'Exhibitions in which the Institute had taken part hitherto had been foreign.' At the first public meeting on the plan Sir Henry indicated that 'it would be beneficial to the people of the island if an Exhibition could be arranged of our natural products that we import from other countries'. He declared that 'an Exhibition of the resources of a country, is not only the best advertisement for business purposes but is the most valuable industrial education for the people.'⁴⁶

The Governor nominated the Institute's Board as an initial organizing committee to 'prepare a plan of operations for the holding of an Exhibition of Jamaica and other products and a loan Exhibition of Works of Art and of Curiosities on a scale commensurate with the great interest and importance of the

⁴¹ For much of 1889-1890 Vine was engaged in visiting India and the Straits Settlements, the Australasian colonies, the provinces of Canada, and most of the West Indian and African colonies.

⁴² *The Daily Gleaner*, Jamaica Exhibition 1891: History of the Undertaking', 28 January 1891, p. 5.

⁴³ *Ibid.*

⁴⁴ Fawcett was also Director of Public Gardens and Plantations. This was clearly the driving force behind his interest in such a project.

⁴⁵ Rebecca Tortello has reported in her article 'The Great Exhibition of 1891: Jamaica on Show', <http://jamaica-gleaner.com/pages/history/story0018.html>, accessed 30 June 2012, 'Sinclair had been inspired by the 1851 Great Exhibition at London's Crystal Palace. He had tried in vain for many years to drum up support for his ambitious project. When Sir Henry Blake arrived as Jamaica's new Governor in March 1889 Sinclair managed to persuade William Fawcett, director of gardens and plantations and chairman of the Institute of Jamaica (IOJ) to help him present his cause to Governor Blake". Also see K. Booth, 'When Jamaica Welcomed the World: The Great Exhibition of 1891'. *Jamaica Journal*, (1985, August-October) 18, 3, 39-51.

⁴⁶ *The Daily Gleaner*, 28 January 1891, p. 5. Exhibits were to include 'our products and manufactures and invite the countries from which we import food stuffs or machinery to send exhibits for our information.'

subject'.⁴⁷ The intention of the Jamaica exhibition was clear. Following years of economic recession, 'the years of past gloom in the island ... the tide of prosperity had set in and that here was a splendid opportunity for the people to show that the days of depression were over.'⁴⁸ It was intended to be a great opportunity for the people from all the towns and villages to show off their products and to be a great leveler, inviting 'cordial cooperation between all classes of the community', to 'work hard and energetically to grasp success'. At an organizing committee meeting Captain Park moved a resolution that 'the other West Indian Colonies be invited to send to the Exhibition such exhibits as will clearly indicate the great resources of these colonies' and 'special exhibits be invited from England and other countries from which we trade.'⁴⁹

The newspaper records how the project grew from this exhibition idea as it took hold of people's imaginations, and developed into an undertaking very unlike the modest island exhibition first conceived on the model of those executed by Guiana and Trinidad almost 50 years earlier. Instead the view was expressed that 'We must not be satisfied with a mere exhibition of local products, and a few pictures and curiosities. A more comprehensive collection of objects than could be obtained within the island or even within the West Indies should be considered, with an animated public 'liberally subscribing to the Guarantee Fund ... within a month of the public meeting the undertaking was lifted out of the level of a local show into the higher plane of an International Exhibition.'⁵⁰ Within months the public subscription stood at more than 5000 pounds sterling. An Act for the planning and development of the Jamaica Exhibition was passed shortly afterwards by the Legislative Council.⁵¹

⁴⁷ The intention was then to hold a public meeting to lay out the main points of this scheme and then invite 'gentlemen of prominence and influence in the several parishes of the Island ... to join the Committee and assist him with their advice and experience'. *Daily Gleaner*, p. 5.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

⁵⁰ *Ibid.* Similarly, local coloured business man George Steibel stepped up and loaned 5000 pounds towards the building. The Hon. Col. C. J. Ward and Mr. Louis Verley also lent similar sums to secure the building where the Colonial Bank would not.

⁵¹ The Act provided that 'the management and control of the exhibition should be vested in commissioners who should be appointed by the Governor, and who should possess the following, among other powers; — "The Jamaica Exhibition Commissioners shall have full Power to hold an Exhibition of the products of Industry, Agriculture and the Fine Arts, and of the other productions of this Island and other Countries, to be opened in the year 1890 or in the year 1891 within this Island, and to manage and conduct the same.."



Jamaica Exhibition building, James Johnson, 1891
(Photo Credit: Royal Geographical Society)

By April 1890 the Prince of Wales had agreed to serve as patron of the event, and the Kingston Racecourse (now the site of National Heroes Park) was designated as the most appropriate location for the construction of the exhibition hall. Despite predictions to the contrary this exhibition, billed as 'the most extraordinary commercial event in the history of the Gulf of Mexico and the West Indies', opened on time on 27 January 1891 with Prince George (the future King George V) in attendance representing the royal family.⁵² Over 300,000 people, both foreign and local, had visited the event by the time it closed in May 1891. At the formal opening of the Jamaica Exhibition Governor Sir Henry Blake made clear the nature of the exhibition:

The spontaneous and liberal manner in which funds for carrying out the enterprise were guaranteed by the people of the colony and those interested in its welfare and... the ready response with which the invitation to take part in the Exhibition was met by the Mother Country, by the sister colonies—notably by Canada—and by many Foreign states led to the enlargement of the original scheme and has resulted in an Exhibition on a larger scale, and of a more general and comprehensive character than that at first contemplated by its originators... Every effort has been made to render the Jamaican Exhibits a complete and representative collection of the agricultural, mineral and industrial products of the Island.

His concluding hope was that 'Your Royal Highness may be introducing an era of renewed and increased prosperity for... Jamaica'.⁵³ Nevertheless, the Lord Bishop of Jamaica may have uttered the definitive words in his prayer at the Exhibition's opening:

⁵² Major exhibits were included from Britain, America, Canada, and Europe, as well as all West Indian territories. See Booth, 'When Jamaica Welcomed the World: The Great Exhibition of 1891'.

⁵³ *The Daily Gleaner*, 28 January 1891, p. 5.

May it be fruitful in blessing to all classes of people in this Island and be the means of stimulating and directing their industry; and their advancement in all valuable knowledge, in all useful arts, and in all lawful commerce. And we pray that these and the like interchanges of intercourse and of commodities amongst the nations of the earth, may prove to be for their mutual benefit in the increase of material comforts, and also be the means of extending goodwill amongst men; so that instead of glorying in their power, to excel in the triumphs of war, they may cultivate a friendly rivalry in the arts of peace.⁵⁴

Organizing Principles

The symbiotic relationship between the Imperial Institute and the colonies was perpetuated in the establishment of the governing body, when colonial authorities and the Indian government were asked in 1890 to nominate representatives to serve on it. Governors were appointed by their colonial governments to represent the colonies.⁵⁵ The charter by which the Organising Committee was made the temporary governing body sets out in considerable detail the purposes and objects of the Institute:

- I. The formation and exhibition of collections representing the important raw materials and manufactured products of the Empire and of other countries, so maintained as to illustrate the development of agricultural, commercial and industrial progress in the Empire, and the comparative advances made in other countries;
- II. The establishment or promotion of commercial museums, sample-rooms and intelligence offices, in London and other parts of the Empire;
- III. The collection and dissemination of such information relating to trades and industries, to emigration, and to the other purposes of the charter as may be of use to the subjects of the Empire;
- IV. The advancement of trades and handicrafts by exhibitions of special branches of industry and commerce, and of the work of artisans and of apprentices;
- V. The promotion of technical and commercial education, and of the industrial arts and sciences;
- VI. The furtherance of systematic colonisation;
- VII. The promotion of conferences and lectures in connection with the general work of the Institute, and the facilitating of commercial and friendly intercourse among the inhabitants of the different parts of the British Empire;

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ For the West Indies these included British Guiana, Trinidad, and Tobago - Sir Arthur Hamilton Gordon, G.C.M.G.; Jamaica, British Honduras, and Bahamas - Charles Washington Eves, Esq., C.M.G.; The Leeward Islands, the Windward Islands, and Barbados - Sir Rawson William Rawson, K.C.M.G., C.B.

VIII. The doing of anything incidental or conducive to carrying into effect all or any of the foregoing purposes.⁵⁶

The trajectory of development extending from the international exhibition, to the development, management and interpretation of collections in colonial museums (both at home and abroad) that followed the model of the Imperial Institute is thus well illustrated. The Institute was given responsibility for promoting the cultivation of a better knowledge of the geography, natural history, and resources of the colonies, and for the advancement of the interests of the colonists in Britain. Representative collections of the natural products of the colonies and India, carefully identified along with the more elaborate collections in the Institute itself, were to be distributed to provincial centres 'in order that the provinces be kept thoroughly conversant with the current information from the Colonies and India, the interests of the commercial man, the manufacturer, and the intending migrant'.⁵⁷

The collections of natural products of the colonies and India, maintained by regular additions and renewals at the central establishment of the Institute, were predicted to be of great value to students in the immediately adjacent educational institutions, and were also expected to serve the purposes of provincial industrial colleges by the distribution of thoroughly descriptive reference catalogues and specimens.

Supplies of natural products from the colonies, India, or from other countries that were either new or had been 'but imperfectly studied', were to be maintained so that material might be readily provided to scientists or manufacturers, either for scientific investigation or for purposes of technical experiment and commercial utilization. The existence of those collections and of all information relating to them, as well as of a library of technology, inventions, commerce and applied geography, in immediate proximity to the government museums of science and inventions, art, and natural history, to the Normal School of Science, and to the Central Technical Institute, was expected to contribute substantially to the improvement of commercial education.⁵⁸

Of the special functions to be fulfilled by the Institute, none would be more important than those most immediately connected with the great commercial work of the City of London and with that of the provincial centres of commerce alike. The provision, in central and readily accessible positions, of commercial museums or collections of natural or import products, and of export products of different nations, combined with comprehensive sample-rooms and facilities for the business of inspection or of commercial, chemical or physical examination, was a work to which the Institute could lend most important aid. The Imperial Institute, as a thoroughly modern agency of empire, was especially well positioned to embed its activities and interests in the expressed goals and objectives of British commerce. This was the driving force behind its existence.

Colonialism as a project of imperial control infused the established canon for western approaches to museum creation, collection and display in order to rationalize the emerging natural diversity of the New World, and to prescribe a more 'scientific' way of seeing or observing artefacts or specimens from foreign territories. The eighteenth-century European Enlightenment had created a society that was curious about the world, while at the same time preoccupied with the

⁵⁶ *Imperial Institute*, p. 44-45.

⁵⁷ *Imperial Institute*, p. 44.

⁵⁸ *Imperial Institute*, pp. 45-46.

concept of nation.⁵⁹ The need for a single public culture - the creation of an authentic identity - is fundamental to our understanding of nationalism, the nation-state and the role of the national museum in this context. Benedict Anderson has identified the museum as one of the three institutions of power that 'profoundly shaped the way in which the colonial state imagined its dominion'.⁶⁰

Cultural anthropologist Sharon MacDonald has suggested that the fascination with collecting that emerged in the fifteenth century was a way of 'maintaining some degree of control over the natural world and taking its measure'. She points out that 'the growth of taxonomic knowledge ... and ambitions of a science of order' [in the seventeenth century] gave rise to the importance of *observation*; every other sense was made subservient to sight.⁶¹ While both these observations were made in relation to earlier periods, two key concepts emerge that are applicable in this particular context. The act of collecting was in itself a form of control over an unknown world; and the methods used to present such items, including indigenous human remains and artefacts which were simply regarded as another form as natural history, within a museological context operated within a taxonomic, almost Linnaean structure. This bestowed on an observer the privilege of rationalizing the relationship between himself and what he observed as the 'natural' order of things, and thus claiming the right to be the owner or master of all he surveyed. Museums as the context for arranging and displaying such forms of documentation and interpretation thus became a way of reinforcing the 'idea' of national identity, through an acculturation process enabling association with imperial claims to universal ownership of the world.

In order to understand this construct as a critical element in the true origins of nascent museums and collections in the English-speaking Caribbean, it is necessary to establish an even earlier origin for the assembly, study and comprehension of new knowledge emanating from the region. During the fifteen months that he was in Jamaica between 1687 and 1689, the physician Hans Sloane (later Sir Hans) undertook in-depth observations of the local fauna and flora, the customs of the local inhabitants, and natural phenomena such as earthquakes. In the relatively short time in which Sloane remained on the island, he gave his deep curiosity about natural history full rein, making extensive notes, and eventually compiling a massive collection of some 800 specimens representing the first plant specimens to be brought back to England from that region.⁶² The specimens were mounted in seven bound volumes that have been preserved intact, are still today consulted and remain an invaluable resource for both scientific and historical research. He then began to work on the information

⁵⁹ The British Museum, that opened its doors in 1759, was established as a result of a bequest by Sir Hans Sloane of his prolific collections from Jamaica and elsewhere in the West Indies, and exemplified both the quest for knowledge which lay at the heart of the European Enlightenment, and at the same time the wealth and privilege of the collector. See for example O. Impey and A. McGregor, eds, *The Origins of Museums: The Cabinet of Curiosities in Sixteenth and Seventeenth Century Europe* (Oxford, 1985); E.P. Alexander, *Museums in Motion: An Introduction to the History and Functions of Museums* (Nashville, 1979).

⁶⁰ Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, revised edition London: Verso. 1991, pp. 163-85.

⁶¹ Sharon MacDonald, *The Politics of Display: Museums, Science, Culture*, Routledge London, 1998.

⁶² Sir Hans also acquired the collections of several other important figures in botany at the time, including Leonard Plukenet, James Petiver and Mark Catesby. These collections were rich in plants from newly explored lands and contained many species new to science.

he had gathered in Jamaica and in 1696 published a list of the plants he had collected, the *Catalogus Plantarum* (often referred to as the Catalogue).

In 1707 Sloane published the first volume of his *A Voyage to the Islands of Madera, Barbados, Nieves, S. Christophers and Jamaica, with the Natural History of the Herbs and Trees, Four-footed Beasts, Fishes, Birds, Insects, Reptiles, &c. Of the last of those ISLANDS*; referred to in short as the 'Natural History' or 'History'. Even the naming of this and similar publications that emerged from naturalists' pens during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries essentially categorized these countries as meriting significance only as part of the evolutionary development of an empire, and demonstrated by their very names that any intellectual capital which might be generated was purely incidental to the overall project of empire.⁶³ Over the next 50 years Sloane's collection grew enormously to fill a large part of his house, and he was obliged to employ a full-time curator. Corridors and rooms were filled from top to bottom with plants, animals, gemstones, coins, antiquities and many more objects.⁶⁴

Sloane's 'Museum' became a major attraction of its time and was visited by a stream of distinguished visitors from Britain and abroad. One in particular, the great Swedish botanist Carolus (Carl) Linnaeus, used Sloane's text and drawings as the basis for descriptions of new species in his major work, *Species Plantarum*. Interaction with Sloane's collection helped Linnaeus to develop the organizing principles for his classificatory systems for botanical specimens that he later extended to the kingdoms of animals and minerals.⁶⁵

This last may have seemed somewhat odd, but the theory of evolution was still a long way off. Linnaeus was only attempting a convenient way of categorizing the elements of the natural world. Nevertheless his work eventually evolved into the more ambitious concept of "race" as applied to humans, including mythological creatures. Within *Homo sapiens* he proposed five taxa of a lower (unnamed) rank. These categories were *Africanus*, *Americanus*, *Asiaticus*, *Europeanus*, and *Monstrosus*. They were based on place of origin at first, and later on skin colour.⁶⁶ It was these principles that essentially guided the

⁶³ Sloane's second volume did not appear until 1725. This work contains careful and very readable descriptions of not only the plants and animals he encountered, but also of how natural resources were used by the islands' inhabitants. His collections from Jamaica were organized in a series of 'Chapters' that approximate the Natural History, mimicking the production of a history of a place.

⁶⁴ Before his death Sloane recognized the importance of his collection and offered this vast resource to the nation for the sum of £20,000, a large sum in those days but probably far less than its real worth. After his death, money raised by a lottery was used to purchase the collection and so was created the British Museum at Bloomsbury and later its offspring, the British Museum (Natural History), at South Kensington.

⁶⁵ Linnaeus's main contribution to taxonomy was to establish conventions for the naming of living organisms that became universally accepted in the scientific world. In addition Linnaeus developed, during the great eighteenth-century expansion of natural history knowledge, what became known as *Linnaean taxonomy*; the system of scientific classification now widely used in the biological sciences. The Linnaean system classified nature within a hierarchy. His groupings were based upon shared physical characteristics. Only his groupings for animals remain to this day, and the groupings themselves have been significantly changed since Linnaeus' conception, as have the principles behind them. Nevertheless, Linnaeus is credited with establishing the idea of a hierarchical structure of classification based upon observable characteristics. Extract from online resource accessed 24 March 2010.

⁶⁶ Linnaeus defined each race as having certain characteristics that he considered endemic to individuals belonging to it. Native Americans were choleric, red, straightforward,

observation and organization of any human remains or material culture representing aboriginal peoples, and eventually African peoples in Europe's and, by extension, colonial museums. These principles gained in popular currency in the display of non-European persons in Caribbean museums from the later nineteenth century.⁶⁷

The importance of Sloane's ideas and the centrality of these collections to the birth and spread of the museum idea, and the treatment of indigenous and non-European human beings both within and outside the museum context, could ultimately thus be said to have inculcated these notions in the British national psyche as it was extended throughout the British Empire.

The Human Zoo

Another factor encouraging the development of regional museums was the rising interest in archaeological and anthropological research, fuelled in part by the development of these new sciences. For the antecedents of the region's museums, growing interest and curiosity about the origins of human settlement in the region could now be shored up by examining the physical evidence of the earliest Amerindian inhabitants, principally pottery sherds and shell adzes which began to find their place in both private and later public collections. James Anthony Froude effusively described one such collection when he visited Sir Graham Briggs at his Farley Hill estate in Barbados in the 1880s:

Passing through a hall, among a litter of Carib curiosities, we entered the drawing-room, a magnificent saloon extending with various compartments over the greater part of the ground-floor story. It was filled with rare and curious things, gathered in the days when sugar was a horn of plenty, and selected with the finest taste; pictures, engravings, gems, antiquarian relics, books, maps, and manuscripts. There had been fine culture in the West Indies when all these treasures were collected. The English settlers there, like the English in Ireland, had the tastes of a grand race, ... It was a palace with which Aladdin himself might have been satisfied, one of those which had stirred the envying admiration of foreign travelers in the last century, one of many then, now probably the last surviving representative of Anglo-West Indian civilisation.⁶⁸

Froude has described the genesis of what became the nascent historical evidence in such an antiquarian collection - the assemblage of 'Carib curiosities' representing the native (uncivilized) Indians, and the pictures, engravings, books, maps and manuscripts which demonstrated the 'fine culture of (civilized)' citizens of these colonies. The conjunction of these evidences with the natural history specimens, which had so engaged the collecting endeavours of the previous two centuries in the region, became the basis of the 'national' (insofar as colonial

eager and combative; Africans were phlegmatic, black, slow, relaxed and negligent; Asians were melancholic, yellow, inflexible, severe and avaricious; and Europeans were sanguine and pale, muscular, swift, clever and inventive. The 'monstrous' humans included such entities as the 'agile and fainthearted' dwarf of the Alps, the Patagonian giant, and the monorchid Hottentot.

⁶⁷ Many of these curatorial practices continued in the region's museums well into the twentieth century as well.

⁶⁸ Froude, *The English in the West Indies*, p. 106.

society might be considered such) histories which informed nineteenth and early twentieth-century museum development in the West Indies.

The ongoing progress of the global phenomenon of world exhibitions or fairs now joined with growing public interest in exotic cultures and peoples. In the context of this development, 'Human Zoos' (also called ethnological expositions or Negro Villages) were nineteenth and twentieth-century public exhibits of humans, usually in a so-called 'natural' or 'primitive' state. The displays often emphasized the cultural differences between European and non-European peoples. Ethnographic 'zoos' were often predicated on unilinealism, scientific racism and social Darwinism. A number of them placed indigenous people (particularly Africans) on a spectrum somewhere between the great apes and humans of European descent.

In the 1870s exhibitions of exotic peoples became popular in various countries. 'Human Zoos' could be found in Paris, Hamburg, Antwerp, Barcelona, London, Milan, New York, and Warsaw, with 200,000 to 300,000 visitors attending each exhibition. In 1883 native people of Suriname were displayed in the International Colonial and Export Exhibition in Amsterdam, held behind the Rijksmuseum; and the 1889 Universal Exposition in Paris displayed 400 indigenous people as a major attraction. West Indian archaeology rose to new levels with the opening of the World's Columbian Exposition held in Chicago in 1893. The World's Fair, commemorating the 400 anniversary of Columbus' arrival in the New World, popularized West Indian culture for an American audience.⁶⁹ Importations by Frederick Ober and P.T. Barnum of 'live' aboriginal Indians⁷⁰ from Dominica and St. Vincent fuelled the frenzy of popular interest in West Indian archaeology and ethnology, and proved a successful investment for these shrewd showmen. Both Amerindian culture and people were appropriated by the non-indigenous population for 'scientific' as well as for entertainment purposes.

During the 1904 World's Fair in St. Louis, Missouri, following the Spanish-American War, newly acquired U.S. territories such as Guam, the Philippines, and Puerto Rico, were put on 'display' with some of the native inhabitants. According to Essayist and Indigenist Political Commentator Rev. Sequoyah Ade:

In what was enthusiastically termed a "parade of evolutionary progress," visitors could inspect the "primitives" that represented the counterbalance to "Civilisation"... Pygmies from New Guinea and Africa, who were later displayed in the Primate section of the Bronx Zoo, were paraded next to American Indians such as Apache warrior Geronimo, who sold his autograph... The purpose was to highlight both the "civilising" influence of American rule and the economic potential of the island chain's natural resources on the heels of the Philippine-America War... As one pleased visitor commented, the human zoo exhibit displayed "the race narrative of odd peoples who mark time while the world advances, and of savages made, by American methods, into civilized workers".⁷¹

⁶⁹ See 'Caribbeanization', p. 199.

⁷⁰ For a detailed analysis of this question see Deborah Willis and Carla Williams 'The Black Female Body in Photographs from World's Fairs and Expositions' in 'Race, Photography, and American Culture', *Exposure*, volume 33,1/2, Daytona Beach, Florida, 2000.

⁷¹ Rev. S Ade, 'The Passions of Suzie Wong Revisited' in *Aboriginal Intelligence*, 4 January, 2004.

The 1900 World's Fair presented the famous diorama 'Living in Madagascar', while the Colonial Exhibitions in Marseilles (1906 and 1922) and in Paris (1907 and 1931) also displayed humans in cages, often nude or semi-nude.⁷²

The movement of objects (and bodies) from these exotic cultures reinforced the specific relationship between master and subaltern histories and cultures. These global expositions (and the museums that emanated from them) were more often seen as places of 'curiosity' - considered as sites of peculiarity and promotion rather than as serving a higher purpose such as education. Jesse Fewkes observed that 'Archaeology is thus able to illuminate obscure chapters overlooked or unrecorded by the historian and ethnologist. It offers the only exact data by which the manners and customs of the aborigines before the advent of Columbus can be interpreted.'⁷³

Amerindian artefacts were from the first collected mainly to demonstrate the complete inferiority of indigenous cultures to European civilisation. Amerindians were treated as 'living fossils' and displayed in the nineteenth-century manner of taxonomic classification identical to that of flora and fauna, their artefacts relegated to the ranks of stuffed birds, animals and other curiosities, and divorced from the indigenous people who had created them. As for the more recent arrivals from West Africa and their descendants, they were largely silent and usually absent from the stages of human history as played out in early museums in the West Indies. The movement of objects reflective of the character and distinct features of these exotic cultures was predicated largely on the need to reinforce the specific relationship between master and subaltern histories/cultures, with these global expositions expressly designed for the purpose of exhibiting these resources for international rather than for local audiences.

Towards the end of the nineteenth century Benjamin Kidd gave emphasis to this position, stating that 'The last thing our civilization is willing to permanently tolerate is the wasting of the resources of the richest regions of the earth through the lack of the elementary qualities of social efficiency in the races possessing them.'⁷⁴ In other words, inhabitants of the tropics had no right to their own resources, which needed to be 'developed' firstly for the benefit of the British ruling class, and afterwards for the colony as an extension of empire.

By the end of the nineteenth century museums everywhere across the British Empire were seen as institutions (or extensions) of power, and instruments of education, enlightenment and social salvation. They took their place, alongside libraries, churches and schools, as a means of providing a sound intellectual and moral culture to the working classes. At the same time, these museums were seen as a vital part of the colonial culture, as they could order and make

⁷² In 1906, socialite and amateur anthropologist Madison Grant, head of the New York Zoological Society, had Congolese pygmy Ota Benga put on display at the Bronx Zoo in New York City alongside apes and other animals. At the behest of Grant, a prominent eugenicist, the zoo director William Hornaday displayed Ota Benga in a cage with the chimpanzees, then with an orangutan named Dohong, and a parrot, and labelled him *The Missing Link*, suggesting that in evolutionary terms Africans like Ota Benga were closer to apes than were Europeans. It triggered protests from the city's clergymen, but the public reportedly flocked to see it.

⁷³ Jesse W. Fewkes, 'The Aborigines of Puerto Rico and Neighbouring Islands' in *25th Annual Report of the Bureau of American Ethnology*, Washington D.C., Bureau of American Ethnology, 1907, p. 17.

⁷⁴ Benjamin Kidd, *The Control of the Tropics*, 1898, nn.

'comprehensible the newness of the 'natural world'.⁷⁵ The early museums were thus established primarily for enlightening the general public about the wonders of the nineteenth-century industrial world, and for reaffirming the colonies' place within British and imperial progress and history. Museums of natural history, science and art continued to grow and flourish up to the outbreak of World War I. However, none of these institutions held a significant historical collection representing the human development of their respective countries.

By the early twentieth century museums in the region (even those which functioned as national institutions) could not achieve the desired professional standards, as most of them were still being run almost voluntarily. In Trinidad, for example, a Scottish doctor observed:

There have been repeated half-hearted attempts to found a museum in Trinidad, but they have all been doomed to failure, as it is nobody's business to run them. Everyone seems to expect a museum to run itself without money or staff. The Victoria Institute in Port of Spain is the only attempt at a museum in Trinidad. It has some quite good things in it, but there is no resident curator, no one with that magic touch which animates a museum and brings its stuffed carcasses to life. Trinidad has the money, and should provide a first-class curator with an adequate salary so that he could spend his life in it without fear of the sack or worry about the wherewithal with which to live.⁷⁶

For colonial institutions in the Caribbean, natural history continued to be equated with national history in the first half of the twentieth century. The tide began to change, as in so much else, in the tumultuous years of the 1930s. On 29 January 1936 at the Institute of Jamaica's (IOJ) annual general meeting the Chairman of the Board, Herbert de Lisser, gave a detailed account of the organization's activities, which was seeking to improve its accommodation from the very neglected and almost derelict building in which the Institute was housed (it had barely survived two hurricanes). The IOJ was seeking to acquire and accommodate a major library of 2000 books with the financial support of the Carnegie Institute. It also wished to recruit a young man to function as an Assistant Secretary for at least two years, after which he might be retained to support (and eventually replace) the venerable Frank Cundall as the Institute's Secretary. He had held the post for almost 20 years.

Over the years, the Chair reported, both he and the Board had been assiduous in seeking the support of various governors and a variety of entities, including the Legislative Council and Colonial Development and Welfare Office, as well as the Senate, but all to no avail.⁷⁷ All parties remained unmoved. Nevertheless, the recruitment exercise was undertaken by the Museum Association's Frank Markham back in London. However, rather than the sympathetic support and

⁷⁵ C. Healy, *From the Ruins of Colonialism: History as Social Memory*, Melbourne, 1997, p. 85. Here the author is speaking of the experience of Australia but these observations are equally applicable to the trajectory of West Indian museum development.

⁷⁶ Vincent D. Tohill, *Trinidad's Doctor's Office: The Amusing Diary of a Scottish Physician in Trinidad in the 1920s*, Paria Publishing Company Ltd, Trinidad, 1939 (2009 edition), p. 203.

⁷⁷ Even the normally funded updating of the popular handbook *Jamaica in 1928* first compiled by the Secretary Frank Cundall and published in 1895, by then in its 10th edition, the Government declined to fund its republication on this occasion.

approval for their noble efforts that the Chair might have expected, the Board soon found itself defending its activities against determined challenges.⁷⁸

Member Basil O. Parks set the tone when he characterized the Institute as an 'inert and passive body' and noted further that 'the remarkable thing about it is that the Governors freely and frankly admit it through a public statement made by their Chairman that they are passive and inert'.⁷⁹ *The Daily Gleaner* provided extensive coverage in the days following, noting that:

Members of the Jamaica Institute met for their annual meeting yesterday afternoon, and for two hours conducted a criticism of the Board of Governors, finally passing many resolutions asking for greater attention to the development of literature, science and art. The Chairman of the Board found it necessary at times to plead for a maintenance of dignity in the discussion so that the proceedings should not resolve themselves into 'a speaking meeting'.

Parks, assisted by 'one of our young barristers', Mr. S. R. Braithwaite, and four young solicitors - Messrs. H. O. A. Dayes, Douglas Judah, N. N. Nethersole and W. E. Foster Davis - 'led the attack upon the Board of Governors who defended themselves through their Chairman'.

This cohort of young challengers was most probably inspired by the published statements of Marcus Mosiah Garvey who, two years before in August 1934 during his address to the 17th session of the Convention of Negro Peoples of the World, had admonished his followers on the importance of living 'artistic lives', stating that "One's civilization is not complete without it [Art]."⁸⁰ While claiming proudly that 'we were [Egyptians] the 'first' of the artistic peoples', Garvey had nevertheless been critical of the lack of recognition of the importance of art in the development of the African peoples, and lamented the lack of effort to identify and develop black artists who might equal a Michelangelo in stature. He gave an extensive presentation on the importance of artistic education for the young, if they were to have a hope of developing viable careers in this field. He ended by saying 'No home is complete without a picture on the wall. Why don't you produce it?'⁸¹ Garvey rejected the hanging of cheap 'reproductions of other races' and advocated the display of images of Toussaint L'Ouverture, the 'greatest soldier of the world for the past 300 years', whom he was sure that children would emulate. He trusted that they would 'legislate intelligently' on that subject. Clearly inspired, the quartet of IOJ Members called for sweeping changes to be made in the permanent exhibitions of the Institute.

⁷⁸ *The Daily Gleaner*, 'A Lively Meeting of Jamaica Institute: For Two Hours Coterie of Young Members Criticize the Board of Management', 30 January 1936, p. 6.

⁷⁹ *The Daily Gleaner*, 'Annual Meeting of the Institute of Jamaica, Lively Indeed', 31 January 1936, p. 16.

⁸⁰ *The Daily Gleaner*, 'Holding of the Convention of Negro Peoples: Mr. Garvey Speaks of Art and Urges Hearers to live Artistic Lives', 17 August 1934, p. 27.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*



Marcus Mosiah Garvey (web download June 2012)

The general meeting of the Institute provided a broad canvas on which to paint the image of a new Jamaica. The cohort had come well prepared and their resolutions were swiftly passed, though amended from their original form on the advice of the Chairman, who made it clear that 'exception could be taken to certain phraseology'.⁸² Each of the resolutions was the subject of considerable debate among the members of the meeting who finally resolved that it deplored the fact that:

...the Institute has acquired no significant example of original or creative Art and that unjustifiable preponderance of attention has been given to matters of alleged local, historical interest [and] urge[d]... the gradual establishment of a permanent gallery of contemporary Art, the holding of exhibitions of works of Art.

...the Institute have failed to recognize that it is essential to the promotion of the objects of the Institute, that regular lectures on Literature, Science and Art should be organized and maintained and... that such lectures should be provided for in future.⁸³

...the Institute is prevented from properly and effectively carrying out the objects for which [it was] created, and that its efficiency is sensibly impaired and its growth and development seriously hampered by the lack of space and want of funds that the Government be asked to increase the vote; so that (*inter alia*) there maybe increased accommodation and house space.

Eventually the meeting agreed on a way forward: that a committee be appointed to 'Confer with the Board of Governors with a view to bringing about the aims of the members as expressed at the meeting'.⁸⁴ However, one particular barrier had

⁸² Thirty-one members of the Institute were reported to be present, including prominent artist Edna Manley, who later led the cause for a National Gallery.

⁸³ A further resolution called for the provision of pensions for at least the Institute's senior officers.

⁸⁴ This Committee included: Prominent lawyer (later Jamaica's Chief Minister 1955-1959, and Premier during Federation 1959-1962) Mr. Norman W. Manley; (influential artist and proponent of the National Gallery) Mrs. Edna Manley; and two of the Institute's key critics Mr. Braithwaite, and Mr. Parks.

been breached. Fierce debate ensued, primarily in a 'war of words' in Letters to the Editor in the newspapers.

...Now the Institute has made the West India Library and picture gallery, and it is ridiculous to suggest that such a work is not of true historical interest. This collection of books, papers and pictures may not appeal to the "intelligentsia" here, but it is one of the best in existence, and is so considered by historians, and all interested ... [in] Imperial and Colonial history, in England, the United States and elsewhere. It is a pity that in their laudable zeal to extend the activities of the Institute, members should show their ignorance of the value of a possession, which is the envy of other West Indian Islands, and is respected everywhere—outside Jamaica.⁸⁵

The Board of Governors reacted swiftly to this outpouring of criticism. The Director of Education, the Hon B.H. Easter, in a speech at the Institute in 1938 marking the prizegiving for a major art exhibition, said that, in his opinion, 'the exhibition, although he was not qualified to speak on its artistic side, had been an epoch-making event in their history'. Although it had not been the first exhibition to have been held in Jamaica, this 'particular exhibition had marked a renaissance of art and craftsmanship ... It had provided an opening for a large number of people who had never had such an opportunity before'.⁸⁶

During the Jamaica Arts Society's annual dinner Dr. W. E. McCulloch's speech toasting the health of the Society departed from the customary. In responding to the criticisms, he was reported to have:

... struck out at the many self-made experts and authorities which he said this island produced in quite goodly numbers. He went on to assert that art was not confined to any particular branch of work; all workers were artists in so far as they did their work competently and with a definite technique. He advised all those who would be artists to get themselves trained and disciplined "in this, the most undisciplined country in the world" and went further to note that "He saw there was going to be an African art exhibition. He thought they were laying too much stress upon the African side of it, African art was very primitive; not primitive in the sense of European art".⁸⁷

As he might have expected in this 'new' Jamaica his pronouncements did not go unchallenged.

In proposing the toast to the guest of honour, Mr. Philip Sherlock, retiring head of Wolmer's Boy's School and the Institute's newly appointed curator and Secretary elect, Mr. Leacroft Robinson referred to Sherlock as:

...having an almost inexhaustible store of folk-tales and proverbs. Philip Sherlock had "succeeded in teaching things Jamaican which were deserving of appreciation; things about which they had a right to be proud." And further that "He represented a new age; he fostered an awakening in Jamaica and helped to bring about a renaissance"... in going to the Institute of Jamaica he would spend his time in the

⁸⁵ Letter to the Editor by Agnes M. Butterfield, Congreve Park, Spanish Town, *The Daily Gleaner*, 30 January 1936.

⁸⁶ *The Daily Gleaner*, 'Art Exhibition Described as Epoch-Making Event', 17 May 1938, p. 7.

⁸⁷ *The Daily Gleaner*, 'Arts Society Honours Mr. Philip Sherlock', 12 December 1938, p. 5.

education of the whole of Jamaica ... They honoured him that night because he had succeeded, perhaps more than anyone else, in teaching Jamaicans to appreciate their own.⁸⁸

While Sherlock graciously accepted this tribute, he took the opportunity to address earlier statements and made it clear that:

He did not agree with Dr. McCulloch that they were too apt to emphasise [sic] the importance of Africa. He thought as a people whenever they mentioned Africa it had been with a sense of shame and a feeling of reproach. But if they were going to build up a sense of manhood and self-respect: they must look back to the past which had been theirs. And he did feel that places like Nigeria and The Gold Coast had something to give them because there was a strong spiritual link between Jamaica and those parts: by mixing African and European culture it will help them to build up a civilization that was entirely their own.⁸⁹

The 1930s therefore constituted a watershed in this pre-independence society's reaching for a distinctive identity. Similar sentiments developed and expanded throughout the region in the decades to come.



Front Facade, Barbados Museum & Historical Society
(Photo Credit: William St. J. Cummins)

World War II stimulated nationalist sentiments that had already begun to develop by the 1930s. Wartime inflation and restrictions exacerbated Caribbean grievances. West Indians had largely supported the British war effort, but expected major concessions in return. However, the war had also released a group of people in the form of servicemen and women who returned to their countries and their region confident in their skills to meet the challenges of their new lives, and who joined the wave of increased political and economic consciousness and anti-imperialism. For many West Indians, the experience of war had drawn them

⁸⁸ Ibid.

⁸⁹ Ibid.

closer together as a people, and the emergence of their world from the toils of war offered unprecedented opportunities for a better life.⁹⁰ At the same time the decolonization movement began to build momentum immediately following the end of the war; the rise of trade unions during the war also considerably increased agitation for change.

Barbados Museum and Historical Society Director Neville Connell demonstrated a new awareness in addressing its deficiencies through that institution's acquisitions policy. He wrote to his colleagues at Hull indicating that

The Council of this Society is anxious to obtain relics of slavery in the form of slave chains, yokes etc. for its Museum which are at present sadly lacking. No relics are obtainable locally and except for a few documents relating to the sale and transfer of slaves there is nothing to remind visitors of this period of the island's history...⁹¹

The 1956 *Guide to the Barbados Museum* reflects the success of Connell's campaign in this regard with its description of the Hall Gallery. This indicated that

This Gallery contains specimens of local historical interest. Case No.59 ... displays relics of slavery. Negro slaves were first imported from Africa in quantity to work on the sugar plantations here as a result of white apprentices and bondservants from England having proved unsatisfactory in this climate. In 1629, only two years after the settlement of the island the presence of negroes is first recorded numbering 50. By 1643, the number had risen to approximately 6,000, and in 1838, the year when slavery was finally abolished, the number exceeded 82,000.⁹²

Elsewhere the Gallery guide made brief references to the fate of the majority population. The exhibit of a Zouave uniform of a sergeant of the West India Regiment, for example, provided an opportunity to explain the origins of that unique arrangement of... black and white loyalists ... formed into a corps of which the South Carolina was one ... which took active part in the fighting in the islands' and subsequently 'in Africa and in the Ashanti Wars of 1864 and 1873-4'.⁹³ These references to the black population, brief though they were - for example, the Destruction of St. Pierre, Martinique, the Arawaks and the Jews of Barbados all merited much greater attention in terms of their prominence within the national historical narrative displayed in the Museum's galleries - represented a critical first step in authorizing their existence on the national historical landscape. Nevertheless the earnest tone of this note is contradicted in other correspondence from the former Governor of Barbados' widow, Lady Gilbert Carter, with

⁹⁰ The growing awareness of a regional identity occurred amongst persons of different islands who met in increasing numbers overseas, mainly in the universities, in the United Kingdom, Canada, and the United States. In alien surroundings, they quickly saw that the problems of each island were not peculiar to that island but were really regional problems; and soon they began to think of themselves as West Indians rather than as particular islanders. Returning home, these persons spread the idea of West Indian unity. The awareness of a West Indian identity was also fostered by improved communications and air travel between the islands.

⁹¹ Neville Connell, unpublished Letter to the Director of Hull Municipal Museum, Hull, 16 January 1950. BMHS Archives.

⁹² Neville Connell, *A Guide to the Barbados Museum*, 2nd Edition, published by The Barbados Museum & Historical Society, 1956, p. 3.

⁹³ *Barbados Museum Guide*, pp. 4-5.

reference to her arrangements for the disposition of her collections after her death, with which Connell's stance thus seems quite inconsistent. Lady Gilbert Carter asserted that

Sir Alfred Savage wrote that Nigeria was starting a new museum & they would like to have Sir Gilbert's [African] Collection (in the front hall of Ilaro). Now in my will I left it to the Barbados Museum, but I feel sure the Historical Society will waive this & let it go to Nigeria as it came from there, ... - I sort of thought that Mr. Shilstone [President of the Society] was not anxious to have it - he rightly stressed the idea that the Arawaks were the only *heathens* [my emphasis] which should interest the coloured people in Barbados & that they should be encouraged to forget that they were brought over from there against their will.⁹⁴

In fact the first edition of the Barbados Museum's guide, while explaining in detail the entire process of the sugar industry, made only a single reference to slavery. The 36-page publication contains a single reference to the enslaved, fortuitously in the History section, recounting 'There are examples of the 'pine-apple' penny, issued in the island, on the one side of which is a pine-apple, and on the other the head of a negro, crowned. There are different varieties of this 'slave-money', as it is called, and half-pennies were also in circulation.'⁹⁵ These are clear indicators of the ways in which some communities and individuals took definite steps to erase history and, in some sense, any reconnection with past identities.

Similarly processes of conscious repositioning again emerged in the Jamaican context. William Patterson's article publicly protesting the nature of the Institute of Jamaica's exhibits indicates that the Barbados Museum was not alone in the distinctly monochromatic hue of its displays. Regarding the Jamaican historical experience, the writer and human rights activist asserted that

If you ask the average passer-by where to find authentic stories of those historical events which blazed the path to the ending of slavery in Jamaica he or she will invariably answer "Go the Institute. It is our cultural centre and fills the cultural needs of Jamaicans". [But] "the cultural needs of such a variegated community must be regarded with great objectivity". The question arises: whose culture and for whom? Distortions of the cultural background of a people can have grave psychological effects upon its youth, a degrading and dehumanising effect.⁹⁶

The writer then critically analyzes the Institute's exhibits against this criterion:

Spend some hours in the Institute of Jamaica. After a careful and impartial survey and you will probably say that: The Institute may be for the white Jamaican, for the Englishman and the American, all that it is said to be - a cultural centre satisfying to their needs. But the value of the contents of this "Centre of Culture" to the divided coloured youth,

⁹⁴ Lady Gertrude Gilbert Carter, Unpublished letter to Neville Connell, Director of the Barbados Museum & Historical Society, 15 January 1953, BMHS Archives - Gifts.

⁹⁵ "What to See in the Barbados Museum: A Popular Guide to the Exhibits" compiled by Thomas Sheppard, 1937, p. 10.

⁹⁶ William L. Patterson, 'The Role of the Institute as ...Jamaica's Cultural Centre', *The Sunday Gleaner*, 21 April 1957, n/n.

especially to an ambitious negro lad or lass is very questionable indeed.
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Patterson's excoriating interrogation of the exhibition exposes the inherently triumphalist nature of the displays. He adverts that

The black man has a place in the Institute of Jamaica as a slave, as a freed man who is a faithful servant for the economic rulers, as a subordinate to his technical advisers, as a backward and subservient figure. His culture is presented to him in terms of what those who rule think best for themselves.⁹⁸

In contrast, Patterson points out the glaring deficiencies and deliberate elisions of history in terms of what was *not* present in the assumed national story on display:

I looked in vain for a portrait of Cudjoe, the mighty warrior for human freedom ... I was referred to a history written by a sympathiser of those whom he had conquered. Cudjoe was caricatured in it, perhaps out of revenge ... I looked in vain for a picture of English gentlemen humbly signing the treaty forced upon them by the Maroons in 1739. I wanted to see pictures of the Tacky Slave Rebellion of 1769, of the Maroon War of 1796, of the revolt of the slaves in 1831. These are the historic events which give character and substance to the culture of the Jamaican.⁹⁹

While acknowledging the presence of the branding irons and the iron cage gibbet on display, Patterson was not mollified by these evidences of slavery which in his view, largely point to an effective criminalization of the black population. He retorts that "on the walls are pictures of contented slaves and their benevolent masters ... This gives no evidence ... of those who bore the brands of slavery and made of these a badge of honour ...".¹⁰⁰ The writer surmises that the abolition of the Historical Gallery was perhaps a deliberate attempt to conceal the "peerless courage of the Negro slaves".¹⁰¹ He considers that

An Institute that is a cultural centre for Jamaica should blazen the walls with the struggles of men who valued freedom more than life. Freedom and Culture are inseparable. Here lies the roots of Jamaican culture. In this respect the Institute is a complete failure.¹⁰²

Patterson's evaluation provided an in-depth view of where one West Indian country stood in terms of its national museum's capacity to address a growing sense of self-expressed confidence. The ability of Jamaica's central museum institution to reflect that burgeoning identity had been found to be both morally and intellectually deficient on this point.

In curating the *Federation Day Exhibition on Aspects of the History of the West Indies*, Dr. Elsa Goveia, the young advocate historian based at the department of history on the University College of the West Indies' Mona campus, sought to address these deficiencies in public knowledge by promoting the importance of Federation as the foundation for a new nation and a new national identity, and found innovative opportunities to expand public knowledge.

⁹⁷ Ibid.

⁹⁸ Ibid.

⁹⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.

¹⁰¹ Ibid.

¹⁰² Ibid.

Goveia, in her extensive Introduction to the 1959 exhibit provided, for the first time within the context of history-making in a West Indian educational institution, a seminal statement of the core of West Indian history. She states that 'Some will say that, among such people, history has stood still. But perhaps it would be better to say that, in them, history lives and will speak to us if we listen.'¹⁰³ In a masterly recitation, recapitulation and restatement of Caribbean history, Goveia contextualized the importance of the region to the advancement of empire. She then proceeded, through a deliberate reconstruction of West Indian history in several sections, to articulate the technical basis for the specificity of the black man's unfreedom within that history. Goveia elucidates:

Freedom confers mobility. The slave's position is characterized by fixity. His status is a matter of law, which places him under the control of a master. The master decides his occupation and his place of residence. The law restricts his physical movement. He is coerced by law and by the master's will.¹⁰⁴

The structure of this exhibit, though only temporary in nature, was a radical departure from the existing permanent history displays at the Institute of Jamaica, and indeed elsewhere in the region. Goveia structured the whole exhibit around the growth and development of knowledge of the New World; the process by which the development of the West Indies fuelled material prosperity elsewhere, leading to the desire to harness its resources and the creation of a slave-based society and economy; effective resistance and challenge to the established order; and finally to the political awakening of the region. She was convinced that 'shame about the past too often fills the place that should be held by knowledge. Knowledge of the past must play its part in our liberation from the bonds of the past'.¹⁰⁵ Her approach was innovative and indeed revolutionary, graphically depicting the bonds of enslavement which tied the contemporary Caribbean to its complex historical past in a way never previously articulated.¹⁰⁶ Through her 'creolisation' of the region's history, the experience of the peoples within the historical narrative were contextualized through the process by which the region's landscape, economy, and psyche were shaped.

The exhibition therefore was a reminder of how West Indians came to be who they were today. For many of those who regarded themselves as West Indians, Elsa Goveia laid out the issue:

It is important to ask what this nation is. If it includes all the people of the Federation, the national Government is the government of the Federation. That Government must be given powers commensurate with its responsibilities. Otherwise it will prove to be as impotent in the face of needs and desires of its citizens as was Crown Colony government in

¹⁰³ Elsa V. Goveia, 'An Introduction to the Federation Day Exhibition on Aspects of the History of the West Indies', University College of the West Indies, 1959, p. 2.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 30.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 42.

¹⁰⁶ The sections were: I - Environment, Aborigines and Discovery; II - Discovery and Early Colonisation; III - Curiosity and Scientific Interest aroused by the Discovery; IV - Economic Development of the European Colonies in the West Indies; V - The Established Order in the West Indies during the Eighteenth Century; VI - Challenge and Overthrow; VII - Reconstruction; VIII - Modern Political Developments, including Federation; IX - History and Evidence: How the Past Survives; X - Conservation of the Records.

relation to its subjects. Changes of government will be meaningless until we have settled the fundamental question of our national identity. In the earlier struggle for our political rights, it was perhaps enough to be anti-British. Now that we face Independence, and the immense problems which it will bring, it has become absolutely essential that we should know whether we are West Indians.¹⁰⁷

Conclusions

Early Caribbean museums were predominantly museums of natural history and science. They were not history museums, and few had significant collections designed to relate to the human history of their respective countries. Of course, within some of the museums, there did exist items that would now be considered as historical material, such as documents, portraits, personalia, domestic items, tools and farming implements. Yet these were in no sense collected with the aim of representing the human development of the country. As Tony Bennett indicates, when compared to European national pasts, the colony 'could not lay claim to a past which might be represented on the same footing as the pasts of other nations within the militarised modes of national commemoration which were dominant at the time'.¹⁰⁸

In this sense, the colony did not have a 'nation' on which to base historical collections. The indigenous population was generally regarded as outside civilized time and history, while pirate, plebeian or planter ancestors were not regarded as worthy of preservation or commemoration, and certainly not the appropriate foundation upon which to build a national identity.¹⁰⁹ The white population still largely saw itself as being British or European, and was content to have its history rooted in that context. The Black majority was not merely marginalized from the scope of museum interpretation, but quite simply did not exist in any formal consideration of colonial history. West Indian museums thus developed in the colonial manner whereby they celebrated the dominance of European culture and society, organized primarily around the exploits of monarchs, great statesmen and military heroes, over 'primitive' indigenous populations. This served to confirm the West Indies' place as part of the Empire, reinforcing the sense of imperial identity, and also re-affirmed the colonies as part of the continuum of Europe's white history. As Graeme Davison has described, state institutions were not ascribed the word 'national' to portray a national distinctiveness: 'Museums and art galleries were national by virtue of their civic and educative role, not because of their exclusively or distinctively national content.' Martin Pröslér goes even further in observing that

... the world-wide diffusion of museums was tied in with European colonialism and imperialism. Their expansion, then, occurred in close

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 40.

¹⁰⁸ T. Bennett, *Out of Which Past? Critical Reflections on Australian Museum and Heritage Policy*, Cultural Policy Studies, Occasional Paper No. 3, Institute for Cultural Policy Studies, Griffith University, Brisbane, 1988, p. 6.

¹⁰⁹ The colonies did however strive to show the progress they had made, particularly through the Exhibitions, which in some ways can be seen as being typical of nationalism.

connection with those political factors in globalization which have provided the contemporary *world order* with its basic structure.¹¹⁰

The organizing principles which had been adopted as the model for West Indian institutions, inspired by the Great Exhibition of 1851, would remain unchanged - and largely unchallenged - for the next one hundred years.

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¹¹⁰ Martin Prösler, 'Museums and Globalisation', in Sharon MacDonald and Gordon Fyfe, eds, *Theorizing Museums: Representing Identity and Diversity in a Changing World*, (Oxford: Blackwell & The Sociological Review, 1996), p. 22.

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