



# **A Narrative of Events, since the First of August, 1834, by James Williams, an Apprenticed Labourer in Jamaica (a John Hope Franklin Center Book)**

*James Williams*

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This book brings back into print, for the first time since the 1830s, a text that was central to the transatlantic campaign to fully abolish slavery in Britain's colonies. James Williams, an eighteen-year-old Jamaican "apprentice" (former slave), came to Britain in 1837 at the instigation of the abolitionist Joseph Sturge. The *Narrative* he produced there, one of very few autobiographical texts by Caribbean slaves or former slaves, became one of the most powerful abolitionist tools for effecting the immediate end to the system of apprenticeship that had replaced slavery.

Describing the hard working conditions on plantations and the harsh treatment of apprentices unjustly incarcerated, Williams argues that apprenticeship actually worsened the conditions of Jamaican ex-slaves: former owners, no longer legally permitted to directly punish their workers, used the Jamaican legal system as a punitive lever against them. Williams's story documents the collaboration of local magistrates in this practice, wherein apprentices were routinely jailed and beaten for both real and imaginary infractions of the apprenticeship regulations.

In addition to the complete text of Williams's original *Narrative*, this fully annotated edition includes nineteenth-century responses to the controversy from the British and Jamaican press, as well as extensive testimony from the Commission of Enquiry that heard evidence regarding the *Narrative*'s claims. These fascinating and revealing documents constitute the largest extant body of direct testimony by Caribbean slaves or apprentices.

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