

---

# Samuel Ward and the Gordon Rebellion

---

JEFFREY R. KERR-RITCHIE

## ABSTRACT

*This article examines American ex-slave and Baptist minister Samuel Ringgold Ward's response to the Morant Bay Rebellion. It focuses on Ward's pamphlet Reflections on the Gordon Rebellion as well as his testimony to the Jamaica Royal Commission in February 1866. It seeks to explain why Ward condemned the rebellion. It argues that Ward's opposition was the logical consequence of the thought and actions of a long-term black loyalist for whom a powerful Empire guaranteed freedom and promised future reform. Its significance is threefold. Ward's written and verbal responses are unique historical documents that have been under-examined. They further exemplify transnational connections that are only gradually beginning to cut into traditional specializations in the historical profession. It is a fascinating topic: an American ex-slave, reform minister, and militant abolitionist who rejected rather than supported the most profound popular rebellion against social and racial inequality by Jamaica's first post-emancipation generation.*

In the early dawn hours of Wednesday, 11 October 1865, hundreds of men and women from Stony Gut marched on Morant Bay in Surry County, Jamaica, collecting country people along the way.<sup>1</sup> They were angry about poor living conditions, legal injustices committed by magistrates and policemen, and the absence of political redress for their grievances. They descended upon the courthouse with conch shells blowing and drums beating. Confronted by this large, vocal, and determined crowd, the local militia consisting of thirty-two militiamen led by Capt. Edward Hitchins panicked. They opened fire on these stone-carrying and stick-wielding protesters killing perhaps a dozen and wounding many others. In response to this unprovoked massacre, the crowd turned on the militiamen, torched the courthouse and the schoolhouse, and sought out political and religious leaders for retribution. Seven militiamen and twenty-two civilians were killed with thirty-four