

SLAVERY

Origins of slavery

Slavery in the Caribbean and the Americas was a relatively modern phenomenon, however slavery and other forms of enforced or bonded labour were not unknown to the Northern and Western Europeans who colonised the Caribbean and Americas:

- Muslims from the 'Barbary states' (North African countries such as Algiers and Tunisia) frequently raided coastal villages and towns, especially in southern Britain, to enslave people.
- The Spanish and Portuguese used African labourers on the plantations in their Mediterranean and Atlantic colonies.
- France and Venice had galley slaves - prisoners forced to work upon the galleys. Convicts and other prisoners could be branded, sentenced to hard labour, 'enlisted' into the navy and army, or transported.
- Many of the early settlers in the American colonies were people who had been transported or 'spirited away' and were sold to local land owners.
- The Royal Navy, army and merchant navy obtained many of their 'recruits' through impressment (as in press gang) and crimping (procuring soldiers or sailors by trickery or coercion). Once 'enlisted', soldiers and sailors were subject to harsh disciplines under the various mutiny acts and were tried under military courts rather than civil courts.
- Orphans and other children on the poor rate could be apprenticed.

In short, ordinary people in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries were not free by our definitions of freedom and most were not able to vote or had many rights.

Slavery in the Caribbean

Early labourers in the Caribbean were White transportees and indentured servants but with a high mortality rate, they were unreliable as a source of labour. Also, once their term of indentureship was over they were free to buy or rent their own land, or to return to Britain or go to other colonies.

The Spanish and Portuguese were familiar with using forms of bonded labour and enslaved Indigenous American-Indians to work in their American mines and plantations. However, indigenous populations had a high death rate especially from European diseases. African labourers who had been used in Mediterranean and Atlantic colonies were considered more suitable than European and Indigenous labourers as they used to working in tropical agricultural conditions, eating tropical foods, and were resistant to European diseases. More importantly there seemed to be an inexhaustible supply of new Africans and 'friendly' African nations willing and able to seek out new sources.

Many ethnic groups in Africa practiced different forms of enslavement: slaves were taken as prisoners of war, as payment for a debt or as a punishment for a crime. Europeans exploited this by supplying weapons and money to encourage raids and local wars to obtain more slaves. However, chattel slavery, where slaves and their offspring were considered to be property was a concept developed by Europeans.

The development of the slave trade

Slavery was soon seen to be an economic necessity as there was a need for labour to plant, harvest and manage plantations and to maximise profits. The trade developed a

highly sophisticated chain of supply, requiring ship builders, manufacturers of trade goods, insurers, bankers (for loans and mortgages), sugar refiners and clothing manufacturers.



Illustrations by Jean Barbot of fishing showing European ships and the type of canoes used to transport slaves from shore to ship, 1688, catalogue reference: ADM 7/830b ff78-79

In many respects the slave trade and slavery stimulated the industrial revolution and led to the development of economic and mercantile models, creating the framework for modern globalisation. Goods were shipped to Africa in return for African produce and resources and slaves, who in turn were transported to the American colonies to labour on the sugar, rice and cotton plantations, the products of which were sent to Europe to be refined and turned into food and cloth which was sold in Europe and settlements in Africa, America and Asia... It was a system that was highly profitable and brought vast economic wealth to Europe.

Colonial Slavery

Plantation slavery as experienced in the Americas was chattel slavery where slaves and their offspring were owned for life, subject to the whims of their owner and could be punished or sold for minor offences. Children and parents could be separated, slaves were gifted to friends and family - for example as a dowry on marriage, and slaves were inherited. Any freedom a slave had was limited by the laws of the country and by their owner - for example, hired slaves or those at market or at church might need passes to show that they were not runaways. Many laws were passed to restrict the rights and

liberties of slaves but also to put 'paternalistic' responsibilities on to the state and owners, for example to limit the number of hours worked in a day, to provide medical care, to provide grounds to grow food, to allow slave markets, to prevent old and infirm slaves being freed and cast on to parish relief and so on.

Manifest of slaves, including names and persons of colour taken on board the ship 'The ...' ... to be transported from the Port of Alexandria in the ... of ... in the purpose of being sold or disposed of as ... to be sold to service in ...

No.	Name	Sex	Age	Height	Complexion	Particulars	Remarks
1	George Russell	Male	25	5 7	Black		
2	Charles Perry	Male	19	5 6	Black		
3	John Stewart	Male	21	5 5	Black		
4	David Jackson	Male	20	5 3	Black		
5	Henry Hill	Male	18	5 5	Black		
6	John ...	Male	20	5 5	Black		
7	James ...	Male	23	5 7	Black		

Lists of slaves including "colours" onboard an American merchant ship en route from Alexandria, Virginia to Charleston, South Carolina, but driven off route by bad weather and docking at Bermuda, 1835, catalogue reference: CO 37/95 ff204-205

Ironically, many found even these few rights removed once they were freed - during the period of Apprenticeship (1834-1838), former slaves still working on plantations found that medical care might be non-existent or that they had to pay for it, waste ground for personal crops was put back into the plantation, and the former slaves could be forced to leave their homes if they did not work to expectations.

Most free people of relatively modest means in the Caribbean, including many free Black people, owned slaves. Slaves were not necessarily cheap to buy but, once purchased, they and their offspring were owned for the rest of their lives. A carpenter for instance, might have owned one slave to help in the workshop and keep house but also to hire out; similarly, many ship-owners owned slaves to work on their boats and to hire out to other ship-owners as labourers and crew. Thus many slaves not only worked for their owner and their household, but could be further exploited as a source of income.

Resistance

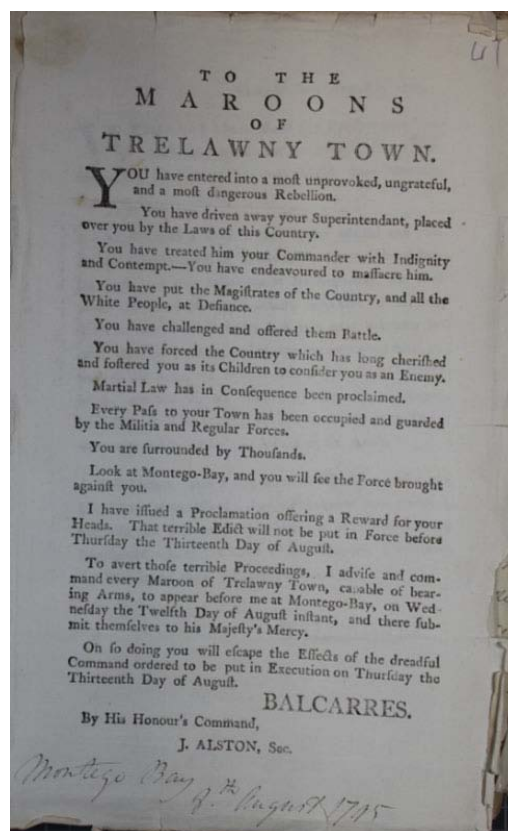
Resistance was the only alternative to enslavement, which started from capture, on the ships to the Americas and on the plantations. Examples of resistance include mutiny, starvation, non-working, running away and rebellion. Slaves who refused to eat or drink could be force-fed. Non-working, running away and rebellion were met with flogging, dismemberment and even death - the reports of a rebellion in Antigua in 1736 show that six were broken on the wheel, five gibbeted alive (hung in metal cages) and 77 were burnt alive.

Traditionally, it was newly arrived Africans who rebelled. Those born into slavery would be aware of the consequences of rebelling and disobedient behaviour. However, it was not unknown for Creole slaves to rebel as was experienced with Bussa's Rebellion in Barbados in 1816 and the last great rebellion in Jamaica over Christmas 1831 and the New Year 1832.

Running away was the most common form of resistance, and Caribbean newspapers are full of notices for runaways. In many cases, however, the slaves were not actually rebelling but simply happened to be 'absent without leave' to stay with their partner or family.

On the smaller islands, or those with limited uncultivated land, runaways were usually caught or had to return to their estate to face an uncertain future. In the more mountainous and less populated islands it was possible for runaways to escape detection and to establish smallholdings. Since these groups were considered threats to the general peace, the authorities regularly attempted to destroy these settlements. These groups of runaways were known as Maroons, after the Spanish word 'cimarrones' for wild or unruly.

Most colonies had Maroons at one time but most were easily suppressed. The most successful group were the Maroons of Jamaica. Their origins lay with runaway Spanish slaves who settled in the mountainous regions of central and western Jamaica; later, their numbers were increased with British runaways. Although their numbers were not large, they successfully fought the British and forced some concessions, such as the right to their own settlements but on the understanding they remained at peace and returned new runaways. They were involved in the suppression of several revolts, and would return rebels to the authorities.



Notice to rebellious "maroons", 1795, catalogue reference: WO 1/92 ff 46-47.

Records of slaves

There are few, if any, records of slaves themselves - they could not own property, make contracts and were not able to attend church, at least in the older British colonies.

Most records relating to slaves are to be found in records relating to the owner. Even where slaves were baptised they needed permission from their owner and the records will state the name of the slave followed by 'slave of...' or 'Negro of ...' and name their owner. Free Black people were also recorded as such - 'Free Black', 'Free Mulatto' and so on.

Other records include official records of workhouses, court cases, enquiries into rebellions and records of manumission (freedom), and newspaper adverts of runaways, sales and notices for hiring of slaves.

Government involvement in slave ownership

The British government and colonial governments were also slave-owners. Colonial authorities purchased and hired slaves as labourers and domestic servants in government properties.

The British Army and Royal Navy also owned and hired slaves as general labourers, undertaking domestic, barrack and dock yard duties, and also as skilled labourers such as craftsmen and sail makers. Military authorities also bought slaves for military duties. Most went to the Corps of Military Labourers and the West India Regiments. The Army considered them to be subject to military law, despite them not actually enlisting. Once discharged, they would then become subject to local slave law, which is something the Army tried to prevent. In the 1807 Mutiny Act, all military slaves were freed although they remained as if enlisted. Rules and regulations for granting pensions and allowances to discharged soldiers did not apply to people who had been purchased.