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The Control and Treatment of Slaves



Punishment of slaves

Slavery and the law

Between 1665 and 1833 the slave population of the Caribbean rose from under 50 000 to well over 1 100 000. Around the middle of this period in 1770, a year for which reasonably accurate figures are available, some 950 000 slaves were distributed among the possessions of five European powers:

	<i>Total population</i>	<i>Slaves</i>
British	500 000	428 000
French	430 000	379 000
Dutch	90 000	75 000
Spanish	144 000	50 000
Danish	20 000	18 000

Everywhere, except in the Spanish islands, slaves formed the bulk of the population, and everywhere their lives were governed by stringent legal codes.

The relatively small white populations were only too well aware that their societies depended entirely on forced labour, and could only survive through the operation of repressive laws. White domination was based on power. This operated at an institutional level, over the legal and economic aspects of slavery, as well as over the slaves themselves. Any honour or esteem attached to being a

slave-owner arose only from the power that he could exercise over the bodies of his slaves, and this had to be sanctioned by slave laws. Such laws meant that white men and women could exercise intimate power through punishment, torture and control of all a slave's physical needs. In drawing up and enforcing such laws the slave-owners in the Caribbean, like those in the rest of the New World, created their own version of slavery. They invented from scratch all the ideological and legal underpinnings of a totally new slave system.

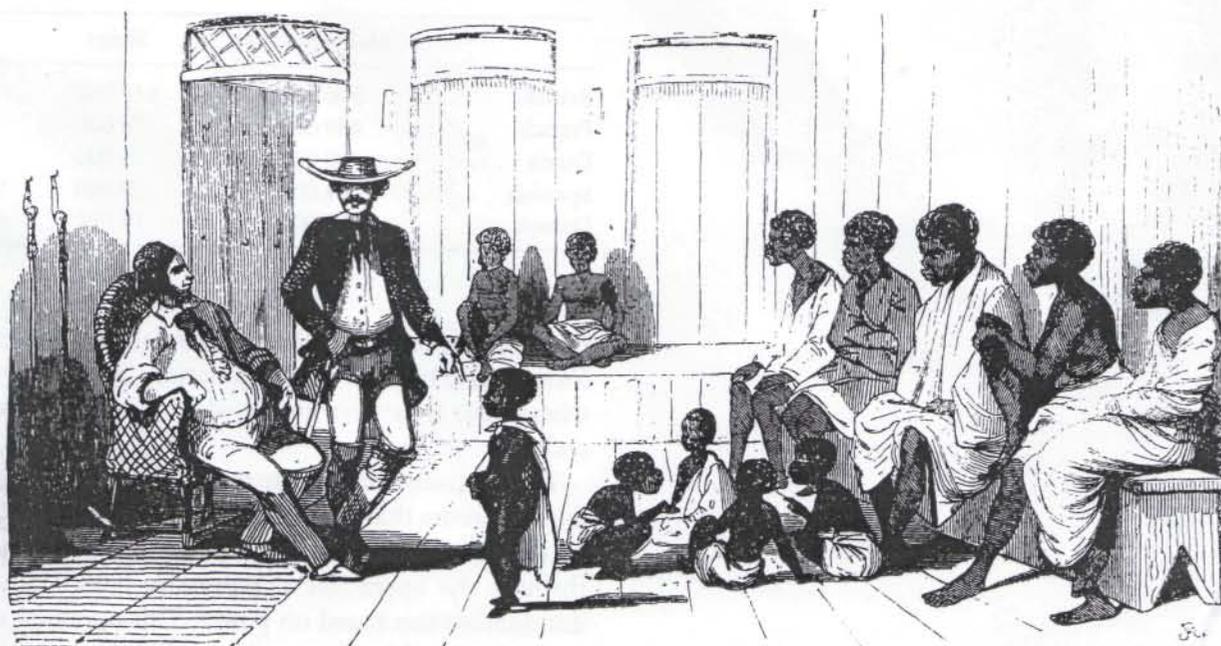
In the eighteenth century about 90 per cent of all slaves worked. Only the invalids, very young children and the infirm, who made up the other 10 per cent were exempt. The vast majority worked on plantations. There, when they were not having to carry out hard manual labour, they were subjected to, or threatened with, flogging and mutilation for a wide and constantly increasing variety of offences. Slave women were abused by white men, and all – men, women and children – were more or less abandoned to under-nourishment and disease. The non-plantation slaves, the logwood cutters in Central America, and those in places like the Bahamas, the Cayman Islands, Anguilla, Barbuda and the Grenadines, had slightly better lives but

were still subject to very similar slave codes. These codes ran very much to a pattern, regardless of the nationality of those who operated them, but those enforced in the British islands were undoubtedly the most severe.

Slave laws and codes in the British Caribbean

Although slavery was not a condition recognised under English law there was little or no opposition in England before the 1780s, to either the slave trade or the institution of slavery in the Caribbean colonies. As a result, the life of a slave in such a colony was dominated by laws drawn up by the local Assembly, most of whose members were slave-owners. These were men concerned primarily with the protection of property and the control of an unwilling workforce, fully aware that such a system could not survive without a repressive legal code.

To such men, slaves were chattels, private possessions like animals or furniture acquired by purchase or inheritance. As a fundamental principle of English law was the security of property, allowing an owner to do what he liked with his possessions,



Inspecting slaves

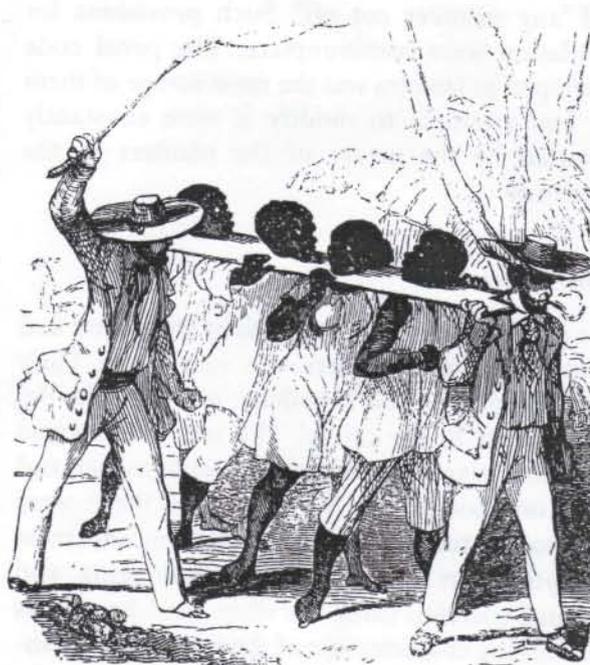
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this took the slave out of the law's jurisdiction. The owner of a chair could destroy it if he wanted to, just as he could slaughter a cow he might possess. It therefore followed that how he treated his slaves was entirely his own affair. Slaves were private property and, like animals, could be sold to meet debts or disposed of in accordance with the laws of inheritance of real estate. This definition of slaves under British West Indian law denied them any protection under English law. Slave-owners were given wide discretion in enforcing control, and until late in the eighteenth century the slave codes allowed them to do very much as they liked with regard to every aspect of their slaves' lives. Among many other things, the law ignored completely the existence of family ties, gave no protection to women against overwork, sexual abuse, or ill treatment during pregnancy, and laid down no limits to the punishments that could be inflicted on either males or females. In the words of one historian of slave society, 'The slave laws legitimized a state of war between blacks and whites, sanctified rigid segregation, and institutionalized an early warning system against slave revolts.'

Such laws began to be passed in the middle of the seventeenth century. By 1661 Barbados had a comprehensive slave code. Although this accorded both masters and slaves carefully differentiated rights and obligations, it left the masters with almost total authority over the life and death of their slaves. The code saw slaves as 'heathenish' and 'brutish', and unfit to be governed by English law. Each slave-owner was required to act as a policeman, to suppress any humanitarian feelings he may have had, and to deal with his slaves with a whip constantly to hand. The Barbados code was copied by the Jamaican Assembly three years later, and later formed the basis of all the others enacted in the British Caribbean. Punitive and coercive clauses formed a major part of all the slave codes, and very little attention was paid to the welfare of either men or women.

The effect of the laws was to deprive the slaves of even the smallest and most inconsequential of freedoms, and at the same time to restrict their owners from granting even the slightest concession. Among the most important common features of the slave codes were laws designed to prohibit and



Owners with new acquisitions

suppress unauthorised movement and the congregation of large numbers. Slaves were also banned from possessing weapons, horses and mules, from sounding horns or beating drums, and from the practice of secret rituals. Special slave-trial courts could dispense summary 'justice', but slave-owners were given very wide discretion in punishing their slaves. The courts usually dealt with slaves who were recaptured after running away, or who were accused of crimes such as theft. Punishment for actual or threatened violence against any white person was very severe.

Although the various slave codes ran to a pattern, they all contained individual provisions reflecting the condition of the society in which they were drawn up. In the Bahamas slaves could be flogged for selling such things as liquor, eggs, fruit or vegetables, or if found gambling. In Bermuda they were not allowed to wear bright clothes or ornaments, nor even to carry a stick unless they were decrepit or lame. A Montserrat Act of 1693 permitted any white man to kill a slave who was caught stealing provisions, and if a slave stole anything of value he or she was liable to be flogged and have both ears cut off. Under an Act passed in the Virgin Islands in 1783, if a slave

struck or opposed any white person the punishment was not only flogging but having the nose slit and 'any member cut off'. Such provisions for mutilation were commonplace. The penal code developed in Jamaica was the most savage of them all, and attempts to modify it were constantly thwarted by the power of the planters in the legislature.

Punishments

The punishments dealt out both by the courts and by individual slave-owners were very severe. Their aim was to deter and humiliate, not to 'make the punishment fit the crime'. The way that owners ruled their slaves varied from owner to owner, and from one society to the next, but there were common features. The most important and most common form of punishment was flogging, and personal coercion using the whip must be seen as the defining characteristic of slavery. On any plantation, floggings were totally unchecked by any outside authority. Brutality and sadism could be found anywhere. Severe floggings were often accompanied by some form of mutilation. Less severe whippings and beatings were frequently carried out in conjunction with making those being punished commit humiliating or disgusting acts. For urban slaves not only the whip, but structures such as the stocks and the pillory which were found in every town, were ever-present reminders of what awaited those who failed to work hard or show proper respect.

The death penalty was awarded for what would now be considered relatively minor offences. An extreme example of this was a Barbados law of 1688, which made the theft of items worth more than 12 pence punishable by death. The penalty was carried out in a number of barbarous ways, all designed to prolong the agony involved as long as possible, and to present other slaves with the clearest demonstration of the power their owners held over their lives. A slave could be hanged, or beaten to death while lashed to a cart-wheel, or he could be hung up in an iron cage until he died from hunger and thirst. Alternatively he could be hanged until he was near to death, and then revived in order to be disembowelled before being

cut into four pieces. Or he could simply be burnt to death, which in Jamaica in 1740 was laid down as the punishment that a slave would incur for striking a white person. All of these methods of capital punishment were in use in Europe during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, but not as a punishment for such minor crimes as running away from work, or for hitting another person.

Manumission

Whether a slave could be given his freedom or not was entirely dependent on his owner. The manumission laws were more stringent than in the French or Spanish possessions, and owners were reluctant to give freedom, as a large sum had to be deposited at the local vestry to ensure the newly freed man or woman did not become a burden on the parish. A figure similar to that of the £100 which was required in St Vincent in 1767 was common. In Jamaica, by a law passed in 1717, manumitted slaves were required not only to carry written proof of their freedom, a precious document which all the newly freed needed, but to wear an identification badge. The manumission of slaves too old and feeble to work was illegal, but it did take place, and was one reason why the vestry deposits were required. By law, owners were required to maintain their slaves when too old to work.

It was only in the manumission content of slave law that female slaves were in a more favourable position than males. This came about because of the unions formed with white men. A slave woman who had had a long-standing relationship with such a man sometimes benefited under his will by being given her freedom, but more usually it was the children of such a union who were freed. The number of women who gained their freedom in this way was small, and very much restricted to those who had had particularly privileged household positions, or who were themselves light-skinned mulattoes. As the eighteenth century progressed, more such women, regardless of the colour of their skin, received manumission or bequests, as did their children. This so upset white society in Jamaica that in 1762 a law was passed to prevent sums of more than £2000 being left to

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mulatto children. All in all, until well into the nineteenth century, women were twice as likely to be manumitted as men were.

Marriage and divorce

Although there was no legal form of marriage for slaves before 1789 this does not mean that marriages did not take place before that date. From the earliest days of slavery, marital and family links were valued by the slaves. This was recognised by the planters, who soon saw that if the plantations were to be run efficiently they needed to buy women in proportion to men. The slave marriages which then took place, using the form of ceremony or agreement brought with them from Africa, did not correspond to anything with which the planters were familiar. Marriage in Europe was very much concerned with the transfer of wealth and property, and in European society divorce was very rare. Among Africans it was no more than common sense to end an unsatisfactory relationship with a simple divorce rite such as that which came to be used by the slaves in Jamaica. This involved the cutting in half of a *cotta*, the pad used for carrying head loads, as a symbol of the severance of mutual affection. Such a rite also reflected on the independence, autonomy and relative equality of African women with men – all of which were missing from white society. Unfortunately, because slaves did not marry in church, and divorce was so uncommon in European society, the whites considered slave unions to be immoral as well as shallow and unstable.

Religion

Unlike the Catholic clergy in the Spanish and French Caribbean who were officially committed to converting slaves to Christianity from the beginning, the Anglican Church took no interest in the slaves of the British Caribbean until the final decades of slavery. In the early days some slaves in Jamaica, Barbados and one or two of the Leeward Islands came into contact with Christianity either through working alongside Catholic servants, or as a result of the activities of Quakers. The attempts by Quakers in these islands to convert slaves met

with great hostility from the slave-owners, and their meeting-houses were all closed down long before the end of the seventeenth century. After that no interest was taken by anyone in the spiritual welfare of the slaves until around the middle of the next century.

All non-Christian beliefs and practices were outlawed under the slave codes, but the slaves were able to adapt and disguise the ways they worshipped. Many of the dances and ceremonies which the whites thought their slaves took part in merely to amuse themselves often had considerable religious significance.

Christianity was brought to the slaves in the eighteenth century, first of all by lay people, both black and white. These ranged from the odd pious planter or white artisan to free blacks who had all in some way been inspired by a religious revival in Britain. The first full-time missionaries, belonging to the Moravian Church, arrived in Jamaica in 1754 and the Leeward Islands two years later. They were soon followed by the Methodists and Baptists. All had to establish a right to preach to the slaves in the face of enormous hostility. This they eventually did, but mainly through preaching that obedience and docility were prime virtues, and that all earthly efforts needed to be directed towards achieving an immortal afterlife.

By the beginning of the nineteenth century perhaps 25 per cent of all slaves had been converted. This then stirred the Anglican Church into some sort of action. This was not very great, as the Church considered the slaves had no morals. In the eyes of the Anglican clergy the fact that many slave couples lived together and produced children, without having been married in a church by a priest, made them fornicators who were unworthy of much consideration. Taking into account the numbers who had already joined the Nonconformist Churches, this left the Anglican Church with only a limited number of slaves they could make any real effort to convert.

Education

Other than being taught how to carry out the labour required of them, slaves were denied any education whatsoever. The vast majority of

slave-owners were opposed to any suggestion that their slaves might be taught to read and write. It was not until the first missionaries arrived in the Caribbean in the middle of the eighteenth century that slaves received instruction in anything other than how to work.

It took a long time for the missionaries to overcome the opposition of the slave-owners to their instructing slaves in the doctrines of Christianity. By the time they had been generally accepted, Bible reading, which had become a widespread habit in Britain due to a religious revival, formed an important aspect of missionary activity. This led to the missionaries becoming involved, to the dismay of slave-owners, in teaching slaves how to read. Where laws did not already exist forbidding the teaching of slaves to read and write, they were soon passed, as happened in Barbados in 1797. An Act passed that year made it the duty of every Anglican priest to try to convert the slaves, but made it illegal to teach them reading and writing. In Demerara twenty years later the Reverend John Smith of the London Missionary Society was warned by the Governor of the colony that he would be banished if he attempted to teach any slave to read.

In spite of such laws, some slaves did manage to become literate, or at least able to read, and probably more women than men. This was because of the intimate relationships some female slaves had with white men, and because more women than men were employed as domestics in situations where the opportunities to learn were greater. One such was Nanny Grig, a slave on an estate in Barbados who, because she could read, was partly responsible for starting an insurrection there in 1816 (see Chapter 5). However, right up until the end of slavery, there was no official attempt anywhere to give the slaves even the most elementary education.

Forces of law and order

With slaves forming the bulk of the population, the slave-owners everywhere lived in fear of an uprising or revolt, and security was a prime concern. This was provided in a number of ways.

All able-bodied white males were required to enrol in the Militia, and turn out regularly for the drills and parades which were intended to prepare them for military duties. The various Militia laws and regulations were rarely observed in full. The more prominent citizens usually refused to serve except as officers, and the planters resented allowing their white employees time off to train. In most islands this resulted in a Militia which was top-heavy with captains and colonels, grossly undermanned and poorly trained. As time went by, in some islands coloureds and even free blacks were brought into the Militia, but only to make up numbers and to do the most humdrum tasks.

Garrisons of regular British troops began to be stationed in Jamaica, Barbados and the Leeward Islands from late in the seventeenth century. These provided the slave-owning communities with added reassurance. That they must also have acted as a deterrent to any slave uprising was demonstrated in Barbados in 1692 and in Antigua in 1736, where conspiracies took place as soon as their garrisons were withdrawn. British troops played an active part in putting down the insurrection in Barbados in 1816.

In addition to the regular troops and militiamen providing security from both internal and external threats, the whites also depended on constables to help exercise control over the slaves, particularly those who lived in the towns. Urban slaves were employed in less restricted ways than those on the plantations, and had more freedom of movement. They worked not only as domestics, artisans, boatmen and fishermen, but in a wide range of other occupations connected with the retail and distributive trades. As such they moved around a great deal, and were generally far less amenable to discipline from their owners than plantation workers. Constables were appointed to provide greater control. These patrolled the streets, checking on the slaves' activities, and at night enforced a curfew system. Later in the eighteenth century places of correction, called workhouses, were established in the main towns. In these, urban slaves caught breaking any of the numerous laws which bound their lives could be detained and punished. The constables also acted as freelance slave whippers, who would flog any slave for a fee.

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They were called 'Jumpers' in Barbados. Their services were often used by owners who did not want their errant slaves sent to the workhouse.

Other forms of slave control

Throughout the colonies unwritten laws brought about patterns of behaviour which made the slave-owners' control over their slaves even stronger. Everywhere custom was just as important as the law in shaping the lives of the slaves. The determined efforts of the whites to make blacks feel racially inferior served to strengthen their domination. It was instilled into slaves that all white people, no matter how lowly or uncouth, were above non-whites everywhere, and as time went by the division of society by colour became more and more pronounced.

Slaves were denied any recognition or symbol of achievement, and a black skin was automatically equated with slavery and social inferiority. African culture was always described as being inferior, while African customs were ridiculed and suppressed. At the same time European values, systems and culture were presented as being superior. Constant efforts were made to undermine the blacks' self-worth and to foster dependence on whites.

Even Christianity was used to promote black submissiveness, and to try to persuade slaves that their condition was ordained as part of the natural way of life for black people. The Scriptures were censored and interpreted to this end, and religious instruction was designed to encourage meekness and acceptance. Slaves were taught that God was opposed to insolence and bad behaviour, and that slavery was a divine punishment for past conduct.

Pro-slavery alliances

In places where they were greatly outnumbered, the whites found it expedient to enter into alliances with free non-white groups in order to increase their control over the slaves. These were the social groups who stood to benefit from the continued existence of a subservient and well-controlled slave community. As well as the free coloureds and the

free blacks they also included Maroon bands and Amerindians.

The nature of the relationship between the whites and these groups depended very much on how heavily the whites were outnumbered by the slaves. In the middle of the eighteenth century in Jamaica, where the ratio was ten to one, the coloureds were granted significant civil rights in return for their loyalty, and independent Maroon communities (see Chapter 5) were allowed to remain in existence in return for their help in hunting down runaway slaves. Where the ratio of blacks to whites was not so uneven, as in Barbados where it was about four to one, such liberal relations were not considered essential. This did not prevent the free coloured community from giving the Barbados whites their full support in times of emergency such as, for instance, in 1816 when coloured militiamen were conspicuous in helping to put down the slave insurrection of that year.

Free blacks, if not so welcome as militiamen, were used as slave-hunters and constables. Many had to take these jobs because they were unable to find any other employment, and such work offered the only alternative to starvation. Early in the eighteenth century Amerindian trackers from the Moskito Coast of Central America were used to hunt down runaway slaves in Jamaica. Towards the end of the same century South American Amerindians were used in the same way in the Guianas. The use of the free blacks and Amerindians in this way was by no means intended to give either group additional status or an entry into the world of the whites. Rather it can be seen both as a means of getting unpleasant jobs done on the cheap, and of discouraging non-whites from seeking a common cause under which they could unite against the whites.

Amelioration

The slave codes were all revised many times, with changes in the law only taking place in response to economic conditions and outside pressures. All such changes only made the life of the slaves worse. It was nearly the end of the eighteenth century

before the distress caused by the constant mutilation and murder of fellow human beings compelled the local legislatures reluctantly to pass Acts restraining the powers of slave-owners, and to make the murder of a slave a capital offence. At the same time ameliorative laws, designed to better the general condition of the slaves, were introduced. All came about because of the growing threat, as the planters saw it, of abolition of the slave trade, accompanied by uncertain economic conditions and a price rise in slaves brought about by war.

From the 1780s onwards individual colonies amended their laws to improve the material existence of slaves, to reduce mortality, and to promote a healthy natural increase among them. Many of the new laws were intended to protect pregnant women, encourage motherhood and promote stable unions by offering cash incentives to slave parents. Fines were also laid down for whites who 'interfered' with married female slaves.

Other reforming laws followed. In 1787 Antigua passed an Act which allowed slaves the right to trial by jury in serious cases. The 1792 Consolidated Slave Act of Jamaica imposed a fine of £100 for anyone found guilty of mutilating or dismembering a slave. Four years later the legislature of the Bahamas passed laws which regulated the minimum amount of food and clothing which had to be given to the slaves, laid down the maximum amount of punishment which could be inflicted, and gave them the right to marry. In 1798 a similar Slave Amelioration Act was passed in the Leeward Islands. The Barbados legislature delayed even longer in passing such an Act, and a law which laid down a fine of £15 for the murder of a slave was not repealed until 1805.

The Amelioration Laws, although widely welcomed by the slaves, in the end made their lives only marginally better. The strict enforcement of the slave laws was considered essential to the efficient running of a plantation economy, and owners continued to exercise absolute control over their human property until the very last years of slavery. Although owners no longer legally had the power of life and death over their slaves, many considered this an unfair interference with property rights. They could not accept that killing a slave

had become a capital offence, and it was still possible to get away with murder.

In 1810 a planter in Nevis named Edward Huggins marched twenty of his slaves to the market-place in Charlestown, and had them flogged by two freelance whippers in the presence of his two sons. One slave received 365 lashes, and another 292 lashes. One female died and several other slaves were badly mutilated. Huggins was brought to trial, but as fellow planters made up the jury he was acquitted. Five magistrates who had been present during the flogging were deprived of their offices. The case caused such an uproar, both in the West Indies and in Britain, that when in 1811 a planter in Tortola was accused of murdering a slave, the Governor-in-Chief of the Leeward Islands stepped in to see justice done. The planter, Arthur Hodge, was notorious for the ill treatment of his slaves, and had probably caused several deaths. He was tried in the presence of the Governor, Hugh Elliot, for one particularly gruesome murder. The jury, made up of his fellow planters, reluctantly and after twelve hours of deliberation found him guilty, but recommended him to Elliot for mercy. The Governor refused, proclaimed martial law, and ordered Hodge to be executed. He was hanged a few days later, becoming the first West Indian slave-owner to lose his life for having taken that of a slave.

Slave codes in the non-British Caribbean

The European perception of blacks as an inferior race can be seen in all the slave codes used in the Caribbean, regardless of how and where they were drawn up. However, there were important differences, both in their content and structure, and in the way they were conceived. The Spanish and French codes, unlike those of the British, were drawn up and enacted in Europe and were similar to each other. Both tried to disguise racism and the exploitation of slaves by concentrating on paternalism, and by suggesting that if the slaves were obedient and accepted their condition this somehow legitimised the slave-owners' rights. Each attempted to balance the need for repression with protection, and made it plain that the owners were entitled to exploit their slaves in return for

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guarding, instructing and guiding them. The Dutch and Danish slave codes resembled the French more than either the British or Spanish, but both concentrated on suppression rather than protection of the slaves.

The Spanish Code

The Spanish had a slave code for their European territories before they acquired possessions in the New World and they simply transferred this code to the Indies. It was drawn up in the thirteenth century and was called *Las Siete Partidas*.

The basic difference between the Spanish slave code and other slave laws was that the Spanish acknowledged that slavery was contrary to natural justice and that it was an evil, but a necessary evil for the economic development of the colonies. This admission caused endless trouble in the Spanish colonies, as it implied that freedom was the natural state of man and gave the slaves their justification for revolting. The first slave revolt was recorded in Hispaniola as early as 1522, and thereafter there was a steady stream of revolts in Spanish territories. The authorities recognised the right of slaves to seek their freedom, so they tried to remove the danger of revolt by other means than repressive legislation.

Charles I attempted to enforce a ratio of three to one or four to one of slaves to freemen. He also tried to enforce a minimum proportion of female slaves and, by encouraging marriage, to create a settled family life for the slaves and make them less inclined to revolt. The Spanish slave laws promoted more humane treatment for slaves and led to a far larger proportion of free blacks and mulattoes. For example, in Puerto Rico by the end of the eighteenth century free coloureds outnumbered slaves, and in Cuba they were nearly equal in numbers.

A slave could appeal to the courts against ill treatment. He could purchase his freedom without the consent of his owner merely by repaying his purchase price, if necessary by periodic repayments. The slave had a right to his provision ground with the consent of his owner. He had the right to marriage without the consent of his owner.

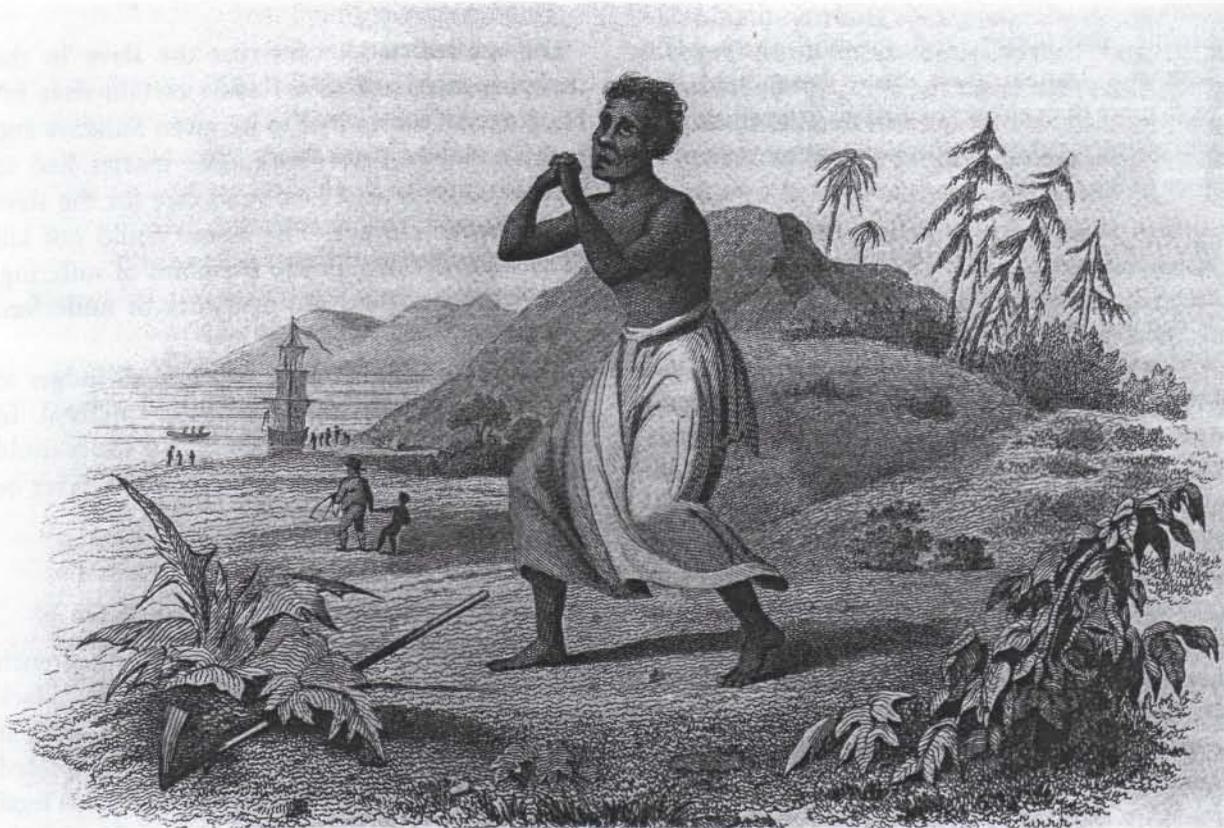
The master had to instruct the slave in the Christian faith and to set aside certain days for this purpose. Slaves had to be given Sundays and Holy Days free from work. The master had to provide clothing and food, and care for the slave in his or her old age. The owner could not kill his slave or ill-treat him to the point of suffering. Specifically, he could not overwork or underfeed his slaves.

Finally the Spanish code required all judges to promote liberty because liberty was natural. In Spanish possessions, consequently, the slaves could find the courts on their side. This could never be the case in the British islands.

The French Code

The control and treatment of slaves in the French Caribbean was laid down in the *Code Noir* (Black Code), which was drawn up in France in 1685. It remained in force until 1804, when it was replaced by the *Code Napoleon*, the basis for the French legal system. The *Code Noir* was meant to be strictly applied, but in practice the milder measures among its sixty articles were disregarded, and many modifications were made during the eighteenth century. Its provisions can be summarised as follows:

- 1 All slaves to be baptised.
- 2 Slaves not to be worked on Sundays or Holy Days.
- 3 Slave marriage to be encouraged. The owner's consent must be given.
- 4 Sexual intercourse between master and his slave to be punished by the confiscation of the slave. If between another man and the slave, a fine to be imposed. Children of such unions would take the status of the mother.
- 5 Rations and clothes to be provided. Old and sick slaves to be fed and maintained.
- 6 Slaves to be forbidden to own property and anything they acquired to belong to their owners.
- 7 Promises, contracts and gifts made by slaves to be null and void.
- 8 Slaves to be forbidden to sell sugar, or any other produce, without their owner's permission.
- 9 Death penalty to be inflicted for striking master or mistress, and in some cases any free person.



An anti-slavery print of the early nineteenth century

10 Absenteeism of one month to be punished by cutting off ears and branding on the shoulder. Absent two times in one month to be punished by cutting off the buttock and branding the other shoulder. Absent three times in one month to be punished by death.

11 Owner to be compensated if slave executed on owner's own denunciation.

12 Torture and mutilation to be prohibited under penalty of confiscation of the slave.

13 Slaves to be regarded as movable property, and liable to be sold apart from the rest of their family.

14 The plantation and the slaves to be regarded as one.

15 Owners and drivers to treat slaves humanely.

16 Owners to have the right to free a slave after twenty years' service.

17 Manumitted slaves to have the same rights as free persons.

Thus, in theory, the *Code Noir* was more humane than British law. For example, Christianity, marriage, manumission and humane treatment were expressly ordered. Rations and clothing were precisely fixed. Mutilation was expressly forbidden.

However, punishments were equally harsh, and in many other ways French laws were similar to those in the British colonies, although the slaves were not so much at the mercy of their owner because the rules of treatment were more clearly prescribed.

The Dutch and Danish Codes

The legal provisions designed to control the slaves in the Dutch Caribbean possessions were drawn up by the Dutch West India Company (see Book 1, chapter 6). These were intended to suppress the slaves, but at the same time to show that the

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owners had social, religious and educational obligations towards them. As in the French colonies, however, the laws concerning these obligations were soon largely unobserved, while the policing laws were expanded and rigidly enforced. As a result the Dutch acquired the reputation of being the cruellest of all the European slave-owners.

In the Danish islands the sole purpose of the slave code was to maintain order. The welfare of the slaves was left entirely to the discretion of individual owners until 1755, when the Danish Crown passed an Act laying down their responsibilities. As this was intended to form the basis for local laws, a conflict then arose between the need to repress the slaves for security reasons, and the requirement to protect them as human beings. The conflict was resolved by concentrating on repression, and the local laws became ever more severe as the ratio of blacks to whites increased.

Conclusion

Slavery throughout the Caribbean was brutal to a greater or lesser degree, but the British form was particularly ferocious. The essential function of the laws devised in the British possessions, throughout the time slavery existed, was to control the slaves and not to promote their welfare. The treatment of

the slaves that resulted was characterised from the beginning by explicit race prejudice.

The slave-owners' control depended on an ability to combine the rest of the whites with the coloured and free black sections of society in defence of the slave regime. As long as these groups believed that universal freedom for blacks would be harmful to their interests they were willing to support each other. In this way anti-black racism was institutionalised, barriers were erected between blacks, coloureds and whites, and slaves were reduced to the lowest levels of social status and material wellbeing. Not all the owners were inherently inhumane like Arthur Hodge and Edward Huggins, but all considered it was necessary to suppress their slaves to protect their interests. All slave-owners worked to make their slaves submissive and deferential.

Had Britain followed Spain and France in allowing the law and religion to provide some amelioration of the condition of slavery, the British slave codes might well have been less severe. But both the state and the Anglican Church remained indifferent, and preferred to stand aloof until the very last years of slavery. Unchecked in this way, the British approach to slave control, and its accompanying race prejudice, eventually spread to the French, Dutch and Danish possessions throughout the Caribbean.