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## The Slave Trade to Jamaica, 1702-1808

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I

Slaves were purchased or reared because they provided agricultural and manufacturing power and services. As Douglas Hall observes, slaves were multi-purpose capital equipment. 'With the aid of small and relatively cheap accessories', he writes, 'they could work on a wide range of tasks and materials, turning the soil, weeding, cutting canes, feeding the sugar mills, packing sugar, driving cattle or building or repairing roads, mills and houses. . . . A man who owned nothing but slaves could make a living by hiring them out in a variety of employments; a man who owned nothing but wind-mills would be less well off'.<sup>1</sup>

Writing in 1745, Samuel Dicker, a Jamaican merchant and planter of considerable wealth and influence, emphasized the great value of the sugar colonies and especially Jamaica to Great Britain. Besides the value of their produce, these colonies were said to be well situated for trade with Spanish America, from whence came 'vast quantities of gold and silver', which were yearly transmitted to England 'in return for Negroes and our British manufactures'. Despite the vicissitudes of hurricanes, wars, disease, slave insurrections, and market fluctuations, Jamaica was the richest colony in the British Empire during the greater part of the eighteenth century, and the richest in the world after the slave rebellion in the French colony of Saint-Domingue in 1791.<sup>2</sup>

Jamaica became the centre of the slave trade because of its expanding plantation economy and its favourable situation for trade with the colonies of Spain and France. The port of Kingston conducted an extensive trade with Europe, Africa, North America, and other colonies in the Caribbean region. Governor Sir Basil Keith reported in 1775 that 639 vessels manned by nearly 7,500 seamen were employed in the trade of the island. Of this total, 233 ships were engaged in trade with the British Isles, 299 with North America, 77 with Africa, and 30 with other Caribbean territories. An additional 45 small crafts were engaged in trade between Kingston and the island's outports.<sup>3</sup>

The demographic experience of slaves in Jamaica and other British sugar colonies was one of deaths exceeding births, with a need for annual recruits from Africa merely to maintain the level of population. Crude calculations based on net slave import and census data, show that the annual rate of population decrease, or mortality rate, was 3.6 percent in the first quarter of the eighteenth century; 3.5 in the second, 2.7 in the third, and 2.0 in the fourth. The mortality rate declined somewhat after about

1750 owing in some measure to improved living conditions, including food, clothing, housing, and medical attendance, the growing proportion of Creole to African slaves, and of female to male slaves. <sup>4</sup> Despite these modest improvements, the blacks were 'in general over-worked and under-fed, even on the mildest and best regulated properties,' wrote a knowledgeable observer in 1788.<sup>5</sup>

Modern estimates of the number of Africans imported into New World territories during the more than four centuries of the trade range from 3.5 million to 25 million. Philip Curtin has surveyed the literature on the slave trade and employed statistical methods not only to approximate total numbers but also to differentiate between centuries, sources of supply, European trading countries, and receiving colonies and countries. Curtin's estimate of total slave imports into the Americas from 1451 to 1870 is 9,566,100. J.E. Inikori has, however, discovered new evidence which points to a substantial upward revision of Curtin's estimates. Distributed over time, Curtin finds that only 2.9 percent of the slaves arrived in the New World in the century and a half from 1451 to 1600. The percentage increased to 14.0 from 1601 to 1700, to 63.3 from 1701 to 1810, and declined to 19.8 from 1811 to 1870. The British Caribbean colonies took off a total of 1,665,000 slaves, or 17.4 percent, and ranked second among the eight regions and countries of import. Brazil ranked first with an estimated total of 3,646,800 slaves.<sup>6</sup>

Jamaica took off 44.8 percent of the African slaves who were imported legally into the British Caribbean colonies. Table 1.1, which is based on data compiled by the author and differs somewhat from that presented by Curtin, shows that total imports in the period 1702-1808 amounted to 828,185, re-exports to 193,597, and retained imports to 634,588. On a decade basis, imports increased from nearly 31,000 in 1702-10 to 143,800 in 1791-1800, or four-and-a-half fold. Re-exports increased from about 8,500 in the first decade to 33,200 in the third decade, fell to nearly 10,000 in the seventh decade, and then rose to 21,500 in the last decade. Numbers retained rose from about 22,400 in the first decade to 122,300 in the last decade, or nearly five-and-a-half fold. As a percentage of total imports, retained imports rose from 72.4 in the first decade to about 85 in all but one decade in the second half of the century. The average for the period 1702-1808 is 76.6 percent.

TABLE 1.1

JAMAICA'S SLAVE TRADE, 1702-1808  
DECADE TOTALS<sup>(1)</sup>

Years	Slave Ships	Number Imported	Number Exported	Number Retained	Percentage Retained
1702 - 10	128	30,891	8,526	22,365	72.4
1711 - 20	222	53,740	24,991	28,749	53.5
1721 - 30	324	77,689	33,179	44,510	57.3
1731 - 40	315	73,217	27,148	46,069	62.9
1741 - 50	254	67,322	15,552	51,770	76.9
1751 - 60	328	76,183	11,148	65,035	85.4
1761 - 70	301	71,807	9,889	61,918	86.2
1771 - 80	—	82,685	11,984	70,701	85.5
1781 - 90 <sup>(2)</sup>	—	84,441	21,806	62,635	74.2
1791 - 1800	—	143,825	21,494	122,331	84.4
1801 - 1808	—	66,385	7,880	58,505	88.1
Total		828,185	193,597	634,588	76.6

- NOTE:** (1) These records were kept to assess the duties levied on slaves imported into and exported from Jamaica. They are lower-bound figures since numerous slaves were reportedly smuggled into and out of Jamaica in order to avoid the duties.
- (2) No data for the year 1788.
- SOURCE:** Period 1702 - 1775. Public Record Office, London: C.O. 137/138, Hh 3, 4: Appendix to a memorial from Stephen Fuller, Agent for Jamaica, to the Board of Trade, 30 January 1788. Two other copies of this report with some variance in the numbers imported and exported can be found in the Long Papers in the British Library. See Brit. Lib. Add. Ms. 12,435, ff. 27 - 30.
- Period 1776 - 1787. British Library Add. MS. 12, 435, ff. 37 - 39: The Papers of Edward Long of Jamaica and England.
- Period 1789 - 1798. British Parliamentary Papers, 1803/4, Vol. X, p. 175 - 39G. Report of David Innes, Naval Officer at Kingston, Jamaica, 14 November 1799. Enclosure No. 13 to the Earl of Balcarres's letter of 22 March 1800.
- Period 1799 - 1800. Brit. Parl. Papers, 1801/2, Vol. IV, No. 653, pp. 50 - 51: Abstract of the Slave Imports and Exports of the British West Indies.
- Period 1801 - 1808. *Journals of the Assembly of Jamaica*, Vol. XII, 23 November 1815, p. 825.

Comparing Tables 1-1 and 1-2 we see that the Slave Population of Jamaica increased by less than the increase in retained slave imports. In fact, some 575,000 new laborers were needed during the eighteenth century to increase the population by about 250,000. Deaths exceeded births because slaves were over-worked, under-fed, prone to accidents and disease, and at times brutally punished. Contributing to this horrible demographic situation was the fact that it generally cost the planter more to raise an island-born or 'Creole' slave than it did to purchase an imported or 'Salt-Water' slave.<sup>7</sup>

**TABLE 1.2**

**JAMAICA'S SLAVE POPULATION AND SLAVE IMPORTS, SELECTED YEARS, 1703-1800**

Year	Estimated Slave Population	Net Slave Imports (ann. ave.)	Net imports as a Percent of of Population
1703	45,000	2,660	5.9
1730	75,000	5,500	7.3
1750	115,000	4,960	4.3
1775	200,000	10,500	5.3
1800	300,000	11,400	3.8

**SOURCE:** Same as for Table 1.1; R.B. LePage (ed.) *Jamaican Creole* (London, Macmillan, 1960), p. 74; George W. Roberts, *The Population of Jamaica* (Cambridge University Press, 1957), pp. 36 - 38.

## II

Jamaica's slave trade was part of the larger British trade which in great measure conformed to a triangle. British manufactures, foodstuffs, liquor, and other goods were shipped to West Africa where they were bartered chiefly for slaves and secondarily for gold dust, ivory, dying-woods, gums, and drugs. Foodstuffs, water, and wood fuel were taken on board with the slaves who were carried on the second leg of the triangle, known as the Middle Passage, chiefly to the West Indies and to a lesser degree to the North American colonies. On the third leg of the triangle the slaves were exchanged for sugar, coffee, rice, indigo, tobacco, and dying-woods which were transported back to the home port. After about 1760, however, the slavers commonly returned from the West Indies in ballast or with a quickly gathered cargo, carrying the proceeds of the slave sales largely in the form of sterling bills of exchange.<sup>8</sup>

John Atkins described two methods of trade on the Coast of Africa; factory trade, and boat trade. A factory was a store-house where a permanent supply of European goods was kept on hand to exchange for slaves. A barracoon was a stockade or prison for slaves awaiting sale to European slavers, while a trade castle or fort combined the features of the factory and barracoon. Furthermore, the trade castle or fort was guarded by European troops and was frequently under the control of a chartered company. Factories, barracoons, and forts were places of considerable trade, wrote Atkins, 'keeping always a number of Slaves against those demands of the Interlopers, who, they are sensible, want dispatch, and therefore make them pay a higher price for it than anywhere on the whole Coast.' Other ships brought two or three boats with them, and while the mates went away in them with parcels of goods to exchange for slaves, local traders brought slaves on board to negotiate their sale to the captain. By these and other methods, less hazard was run in lengthening the time, which resulted in sickness and mortality among the slaves and crew and heavy charges for wages, food, and medical attendance.<sup>9</sup>

Male slaves were purchased in greater numbers than females. Planters generally preferred to purchase young males who were capable of sustained field labour to females who were periodically idled by pregnancy and child care. In Africa, on the other hand, fewer females than males were generally offered for sale by black traders. This was because it was customary for men to have plural wives and women were highly valued as cultivators of the soil. Moreover, women were less prone to run away and commit crimes which were made punishable by enslavement and sale.<sup>10</sup> Table 1.3 shows a male to female ratio of about nine to five in a total of 121 cargoes of slaves imported into Jamaica.

TABLE 1.3

**MALE AND FEMALE SLAVE IMPORTS,  
JAMAICA, 1764 - 74, 1779 - 84**

	Males	Females	Total
Total of 121 cargoes	25,893	14,732	41,625
Percent of total	62.2	37.8	100.0

**SOURCE:** British Parliamentary Papers, Vol. XXVI, 1789, No. 646a, Part II, Jamaica Appendix: 'Report of the Lords of the Committee for Trade and Plantations on the Slave Trade.'

The marked dominance of both males and adults is underscored by the statistics compiled by Herbert S. Klein. Out of a sample of 49,884 slaves imported into Jamaica in 149 ships in the years from 1791 to 1798, he calculates that 57.5 percent were men, 35.5 percent women, 4.3 percent boys, and 2.7 percent girls.<sup>11</sup>

Since every slave ship was the meeting place of geographically remote disease environments, it is not surprising that their human cargoes became breeding grounds for disease that originated in Africa, Europe, and the Americas. Included among the long list of diseases and ailments suffered on the Middle Passage were dysentery, diarrhoea, ophthalmia, malaria, smallpox, yellow fever, scurvy, measles, typhoid fever, hookworm, tapeworm, sleeping sickness, trypanosomiasis, yaws, syphilis, leprosy, and elephantiasis. Slaves also suffered from friction sores, ulcers, and injuries and wounds resulting from accidents, fights, and whippings.<sup>12</sup>

Various medical measures were taken to reduce slave mortality on the Middle Passage, of which the most successful were perhaps inoculation for smallpox and the use of citrus fruits and other antiscorbutics for scurvy. Mortality also declined because of Parliamentary regulation, changes in ship design and trading methods which reduced average time on the Coast of Africa and on the Middle Passage. The records of the Royal African Company show a marked decline in loss in transit from 23.5 percent in 1680-1688, to an average of ten percent in 1734. One recent investigator has calculated a mean mortality rate of 8.5 percent from a large random sample spanning the years 1769 to 1787. Samples for subsequent years show the rate declined steadily from 9.5 percent in 1791 to 2.7 in 1795, and averaged 4.0 percent during the last decade of the lawful trade.<sup>13</sup>

Mortality rates varied among major African slave-providing areas. A specialized study is concerned with some 301 British slavers which transported a total of 101,676 blacks to the West Indies in the period 1791-1797. Nearly three-fifths of these blacks were carried to Jamaica. Average mortality ranged from 2.75 percent for Gold Coast slaves to 10.56 percent for those from the Bight of Biafra. The overall average is 5.65 percent. Mortality ranged between 2 and 3 percent for slaves from the Gold Coast and Senegambia; between 3 and 4 percent for those from the Windward Coast, Congo-Angola, and Sierra Leone; and between 4 and 5 percent for those from the Bight of Benin.<sup>14</sup>

Despite some effort toward regulation and reform, there is no reason to question the opinion of one witness who told the Select Committee of the House of Commons that the slave trade was 'founded on injustice and treachery, manifestly carried on by oppression and cruelty, and not unfrequently terminating in murder'.<sup>15</sup> The trade on the Coast of Africa both fostered and depended upon war, crime, fraud, and social disruption. Chained and confined together in pestilential quarters on board the slave ships, numerous slaves fell victim to dysentery and fevers, others became so dejected and despondent that they refused to take food and medicine, while others still committed suicide by jumping into the sea. These and other horrors should not obscure the fact that the vessels on the Middle Passage were labor transports, prisons, larders, and hospitals. Besides the slaves and supplies of food, water and medicine, they carried a large complement of officers and seamen who served as security guards, cooks, scullery hands, sanitary workers, doctors and nurses in what should be regarded as a logistic and economic undertaking of some moment.<sup>16</sup>

One of the most unique accounts of the Middle Passage was written by a passenger on a slave ship. The Reverend John Riland, M.A. was born on 8 July 1778 on a sugar plantation in Jamaica and sent to England for his education at the age of seven. In

return for financial support, his father required him upon the completion of his university work at Oxford 'to sail first in a slave-ship from Liverpool to the windward coast of Africa; and thence, with a living cargo, to Port Royal (Jamaica).' Riland said he was astonished that his father, who was making an effort to Christianize his slaves, should suddenly introduce him 'into the very depth of its abominations.'<sup>17</sup>

According to his agreement, Riland in 1801 'embarked at Liverpool in a vessel amply stored with the apparatus of bondage and misery, for the African coast.' After arriving in Africa, several weeks were occupied in trading European goods for slaves and ivory. Riland recorded on 6 May, upon their departure from Africa, 'The slaves had a very unhealthy look; being meagre, dirty, and without one exception, scorbutic. There were on board, in all, two hundred and forty -- viz. one hundred and seventy males and seventy females. Four slaves had already died.'<sup>18</sup>

The food of the slaves was boiled rice, over which was poured a sauce, called slabber sauce, made by boiling pieces of scuttle fish and perhaps some beef bones in water.

It was the doctor's province (Riland wrote) to see that the rice was properly cooked, exactly portioned out, and sufficiently cool. Such of the slaves as did not eat heartily, were ordered to eat, and threatened with punishment if they did not; but it often appeared that those who refused to eat were indisposed. The sick, especially those with dysentery, were kept separate from the others: the men in the long-boat, over which was thrown an awning; the women under the half-deck. None of the slaves had any clothing allowed them, and they slept on the bare boards. How painful this bed must have been considering the friction caused by the incessant, and at times violent, motion of the ship, may be easily conceived.

Riland observed that several of the slaves rejected their food. The officer on duty shook his whip at those who refused to eat, threatening to throw them into the sea. Upon his further shaking the whip, 'the slaves made a shew of eating, by putting a little rice into their mouths; but whenever the officer's back was turned, they threw it into the sea.'<sup>19</sup>

The mortality on the Middle Passage was considerable, Riland wrote. Twelve slaves died in the short space of seven weeks.

This was a mortality of no less than five per cent, in seven weeks; and, though moderate in comparison of the mortality on board some ships, yet was it sufficient to unpeople the earth in less than three years, were it general. One cause of mortality was the badness of the water, which, in consequence of the casks having been badly cleaned, had so nauseous a smell that I was obliged to confine myself to malt liquor as a beverage.

Riland concluded that the medical practice on board was certainly faulty and probably contributed to the mortality. Another contributory factor 'was an indifference to life or rather an absolute distaste for it, in the patients themselves'.<sup>20</sup>

### III

The demand for slaves in Jamaica stemmed both from conditions governing sales in re-export markets and from factors influencing sales in the local market. Sales in re-export markets waxed and waned according to such factors as war and peace and the severity or laxity of enforcement of restrictions on shipping and trade between the colonies of different European nations. Sales in Jamaica were influenced by the prices of sugar and other staples which were produced by slave labor; the relative prices of slaves and other inputs, both imported and domestic; the extent to which

profits were re-invested in slaves and other plantation inputs; the safety and cost of shipping between Jamaica and external markets; and the ability to absorb slaves into a society where blacks far outnumbered whites without disturbance to public order from slave absenteeism and insurrection. To deal with these and other factors in some depth, it will be appropriate to restrict the scope of the remaining sections of this paper to three critical decades – the 1730s, 1770s, and 1790s.

During the 1730s re-export markets were larger than the Jamaican market from 1730 to 1733, after which the island market consistently took off more slaves than foreign markets. Together with other British sugar colonies, Jamaica experienced a recession in its domestic economy during the early 1730s which was due in large measure to the decline of sugar prices and profit margins. The Duke of Newcastle was informed by the Council and Assembly of Jamaica in August 1734, that the island had never been in greater distress. This was occasioned by 'a chain of losses and misfortunes', including hurricanes, drought, 'the lowness of our produce in Great Britain, the loss of our trade and the heavy taxes we have been under the necessity of raising to defray the expence of the parties fitted out against the rebellious negroes.'<sup>21</sup>

Contrasted with the weakness of the domestic market in the early 1730s, was the strength of foreign markets. From 1730 to 1733 slave imports into Jamaica averaged 10,287 annually; re-exports, 5,349; and retained imports, 4,939. Since about 1680 Jamaica had been an *entrepot*, or transshipment point for slaves, British manufactures, and North American foodstuffs. By the Treaty of Utrecht in 1713, the South Sea Company of England was awarded the much coveted *Asiento*, or exclusive contract to supply Spanish subjects in America to a maximum of 4,800 slaves per annum, as well as British manufactures by means of an annual ship. Disputes over the terms and conduct of the *Asiento* agreement led to an undeclared war between England and Spain from 1727 to 1729. Following the Treaty of Seville in the latter year, only occasional attacks on English shipping were made by Spanish coast guard vessels, or *guarda-costas*, until the autumn of 1736 when Spanish reprisals began to mount until war commenced again in October 1739.<sup>22</sup>

The *Asiento* trade was a thorn in the flesh of Jamaica planters and Bristol and Liverpool slave merchants and their factors in Jamaica. In a representation to the Board of Trade of 2 May 1735, the President, Council and Assembly of Jamaica complained that the establishment of the South Sea Company's factory had been a considerable obstruction to the settlement of the island 'and the principal cause of the diminution of its inhabitants, as that branch of Commerce was formerly carried on by separate traders, and not only employed above one thousand seamen who were a considerable strength and security to the Island, but was the means of vending very considerable quantities of British manufactures, and introducing six hundred thousand pounds per annum, of which the greatest part was re-exported to our Mother Country.'<sup>23</sup> Planters also complained that the Company's factors sold all of their able-bodies, young slaves to the Spaniards, leaving them with old, sickly and decrepit slaves who were priced as high as the exported blacks.<sup>24</sup>

Foremost in the chain of losses and misfortunes which beset white Jamaicans in the 1730s was the resistance of plantation slaves and the Maroons who lived in remote and inaccessible parts of the island. Opportunities to resist were enhanced by the low ratio of whites to blacks and the lack of public funds to support the military establishment. The First Maroon War impinged on the slave trade in several ways. It no doubt contributed to the weak demand for slaves in Jamaica. Moreover, the problem of financing the military campaign against the Maroons was solved in

part by levying a duty on slave imports and re-exports. In an address to the King, the Council and Assembly of Jamaica said that an expense of at least £2,000 a month was incurred in the campaign to reduce the rebellious blacks. After some resistance by the Board of Trade, the Governor of Jamaica was empowered to give his consent to a law to lay a reasonable duty on imported and re-exported slaves which would not discriminate against the South Sea Company.<sup>25</sup>

The year 1737 marked a turning point in the political economy of Jamaica. On the one hand, the Maroon War subsided and two years later a treaty was negotiated by which the Maroons were granted an inaccessible portion of Jamaica with their own government in exchange for agreeing to return runaway slaves and cooperate with the whites in suppressing servile revolts. On the other hand, mounting attacks by Spanish *guarda-costas* on English ships suspected of illicit trade led to a series of reprisals and the outbreak of the War of Jenkins' Ear in October 1739. Slave re-exports from Jamaica, which ranged between 1,600 and 2,260 annually from 1734 to 1738, fell to 598 in 1739 and 495 in 1740. Indeed, all branches of the Jamaican slave trade declined from 1734 to 1740. On an annual average basis, imports amounted to 6,025, re-exports to 1,568, and retained imports to 4,457. Compared with the averages of 1730-34, imports declined by 40 percent, re-exports by 70 percent, and retained imports by 10 percent. Depression, the Maroon War and Spanish resistance to illicit trade thus played a vital part in diminishing the slave trade to Jamaica after 1733.<sup>26</sup>

#### IV

Jamaica during the thirty years from 1740 to 1770 was the scene of two major wars, two slave insurrections of some consequence, a rapidly growing plantation economy, and fluctuations in the sugar and slave trades. From Table 1.1 we see that on a decade basis slave imports declined somewhat in the 1740s (67,322) by comparison with the 1730s, (73,217), rose in the 1750s (76,183) above the level of the 1730s, and declined in the 1760s (71,807). Re-exported slaves were far fewer in the 1740s (15,552) than they had been in the 1730s (27,148). Moreover, re-exports continued to decline in the 1750s (11,148) and 1760s (9,889). Retained imports, which were slightly higher in the 1740s (51,770) than they had been in the 1730s (46,069), increased substantially in the 1750s (65,035) and declined slightly in the 1760s (61,918).

The remarkable expansion of the Jamaican economy from the end of the Seven Years War in 1763 to the outbreak of the American Revolution in 1775 can be underscored with a few relevant statistics. Whereas the white population increased from an estimated 15,000 in 1762 to 18,420 in 1778, that of black slaves rose from 146,464 to 205,261. Plantation agriculture spread to outlying parishes which had been unsafe for white settlement prior to the Maroon Treaty of 1739. In 1774, there were 775 sugar plantations of an estimated mean value of £19,500 sterling each. The aggregate wealth of Jamaica amounted to about £18,000,000; exports to some £1,437,000, and the net income of the island to £1,547,000 – all in sterling values. Jamaica had nearly attained 'the meridian of its prosperity' by the eve of the American Revolution, according to Bryan Edwards, the planter-historian.<sup>27</sup>

Despite wartime interruptions after 1774, the slave trade of Jamaica reached new heights in the decade of the 1770s. Decade totals show that imports increased by nearly 11,000 over the previous decade, re-exports by 2,100, and retained imports by nearly 10,000.



That the expansion occurred in the middle years of the decade and that for several years there were two inconsistent reports of the trade is indicated by the statistics in Table 1.4, Edward Long, the Jamaican planter-historian, was of the opinion that the wide discrepancy in the statistics for the year 1775 'may have happened from Mr. Fuller's account having taken in only the half year imports & exports'.<sup>28</sup>

TABLE 1.4

JAMAICA'S SLAVE TRADE: THE BOOM YEARS, 1773-76

Year	Imports	Re-exports	Retained Imports
1773	9,676 (10,729)	800 ( 587)	8,876 (10,142)
1774	18,448 (17,686)	2,511 (2,658)	15,937 (15,028)
1775	9,292 (17,364)	1,629 (3,494)	7,663 (13,870)
1776	18,400 (17,364)	3,384	15,016

SOURCE: For the years 1773, 1774 and 1775 (unbracketed): Appendix to the Memorial of Stephen Fuller, Agent for Jamaica. Public Record Office, London, Colonial Office 137/38, Hh 3, 4.

For the years 1773, 1774 and 1775 (in brackets) and 1776 (unbracketed): *Parliamentary Papers*, 1790-91, Vol. XXIX, No. 698, p. 497: 'Minutes of Evidence: Select Committee of the House of Commons on the Slave Trade.'

The trade expansion had its source in West Africa. Writing from Cape Coast Castle on the Gold Coast, Governor David Mill reported to the Committee of the Company of Merchants Trading to Africa on 21 March 1774, 'The English had this last year a much greater share of the trade than the Dutch; and I believe a greater number of slaves had been purchased by the British Shipping, than in any one year for some time past.' The Committee wrote to Mill on 5 December 1774, saying it was glad to find that peace and a free intercourse of trade had been restored between the Ashantees and Fantees. Mill wrote back on 15 April of the following year that there was 'so free an intercourse on trade, that a far greater number of slaves were exported in 1774, than in any one year since the establishment (of the Company in 1750).'<sup>29</sup>

The credit crisis of 1772-73 and the events leading up to the American Revolution go far to explain the huge influx of slaves into Jamaica. Slave imports which had been especially heavy into the Windward Islands during the years of prosperity from 1770 to 1772, were diverted to Jamaica in growing numbers after the boom collapsed. Similarly, slaves were diverted from the Southern Mainland Colonies, and especially South Carolina, partly in consequence of the credit crisis, partly due to increased import duties on slaves, and partly due to mounting conflict with the Mother Country which led to non-importation agreements in 1774.<sup>30</sup>

Rather surprisingly, the surge in Jamaican imports commenced in February 1774, when the island legislature imposed an additional duty on slaves. Governor Keith wrote to the Earl of Dartmouth on 16 May 1775, that since the passage of the duty act 'they have sold above twenty thousand slaves; a number they did not formerly vend in treble the time: and it is well known that the merchants have ordered their ships *since the above act took place* to come to Jamaica directly from Guinea without trying the market of the Windward Islands as was formerly usual.' The reason for this was obvious, he said: 'they know this to be the preferable market; and they cannot give an instance of their negroes laying upon hands; on the contrary since the passing of the additional bill the sales have been quicker than ever.'<sup>31</sup>

The Act of 13 February 1774 added forty shillings to the existing duty of ten shillings on every slave imported, while the duty of twenty shillings on exportation continued without change. Despite vigorous protests from slave merchants, particularly those of Bristol and Liverpool, the Board of Trade permitted the duty to stand since it had but a year to run. But before the Act expired it was replaced by another Act which imposed a duty of five pounds per imported slave. The latter Act, which was forthwith disallowed by the Board of Trade, was justified by the Jamaican Assembly as necessary to check the growing racial imbalance and the threat of servile revolt.<sup>32</sup>

The slave duty acts were also motivated by the fear of bankruptcy which stemmed from the liberal credit enabling planters to purchase great numbers of slaves. John Fletcher, a London-based slave trader in the 1770s, invariably instructed the captain of his vessel to take only the bills of exchange which were guaranteed by London sugar merchants. He preferred to deal with Thomas Hibbert, the leading slave dealer in Jamaica and kinsman of prominent sugar merchants in London. In a letter of 22 December 1774, Fletcher observed that the Guinea trade was in some difficulty from 'the great quantity of negroes sold at Jamaica this last year and that in order to keep up the price the merchants now are obliged to give a Long Credit to Planters.'<sup>33</sup> Unfortunately for the slaves, planters were frequently tempted by long credits to purchase more slaves than they were able to provide with adequate food, clothing, and shelter. The principal occasion of the planter's financial distress, asserted William Beckford, the planter-historian, was the improvident purchase of slaves.<sup>34</sup>

Humanitarian motives possibly had some part to play in the efforts to limit the slave trade, although such motives are difficult to verify. One curious incident concerns a debating society in Kingston, Jamaica. Thomas Hibbert, 'who had been forty or fifty years the most eminent Guinea factor there,' proposed the following question: 'Whether the trade to Africa for slaves was consistent with sound policy, the laws of nature and morality?' After a discussion which occupied several meetings of the society in 1774, it was determined by the majority 'that *the trade to Africa for slaves was neither consistent with sound policy, the laws of nature, nor morality.*'<sup>35</sup>

But the debate was apparently little more than an academic exercise. Not only did the Jamaican market continue to supply local planters with workers but the demand also increased because of the Spanish trade. In October 1773, a local slave dealer wrote that a contract had been negotiated between the governments of Great Britain and Spain, whereby the Spaniards were to be supplied with blacks at Kingston and allowed special terms with respect to prices, duties, and other particulars. In the following month the same slave dealer wrote that 'Negroes continue in demand, the Spaniards are now here on purchase, one of them brought 100,000 dollars, but they appear to expect them at low rates, for they as yet, have offered but £38 sterling, to have the first choice, which will never do . . .'<sup>36</sup>

Jamaica's slave trade fell off drastically in the last four years of the decade. Imports declined from 18,400 in 1776, to 5,607 in 1777, and continued to decline to 3,267 in 1780. Re-exports followed a similar course, declining from 3,384 in 1776, to 558 in 1777, and to only 252 in 1780. In part, the decline was what one might expect as a normal response to a glutted market. But the impact was unusually severe because of wartime shipping losses, rising prices of imported foodstuffs and other supplies, and a hurricane of considerable destructive force in 1780. The slaves themselves added to the turmoil, for the insurrection plot of 1776 in the parish of Hanover resulted in thirty executions and fear of island-wide rebellion.<sup>37</sup>

From the outbreak of the American Revolution to the slave emancipation Act of 1833, Jamaica was involved in the great democratic and humanitarian revolutions of the age. Besides the American and French revolutions, the Western World was agitated by the slave revolt in Saint-Domingue, the Anglo-French War, and the humanitarian revolution which was directed chiefly against the evils of the slave trade and chattel slavery. In the remainder of this paper we shall be concerned with the impact of revolutions, wars, insurrections, and other phenomena on Jamaica's slave trade during the decade of the 1790s.

The American Revolution dealt a heavy blow to the British Caribbean economy, Supplies of foodstuffs and building materials from the northland became precarious and costly, outlets for rum and molasses were curtailed, and great fleets of sugar-carrying ships were intercepted by American privateers before they reached British ports. In Jamaica an unprecedented series of destructive hurricanes struck in the years 1780, 1781, 1784, 1785 and 1786. As a consequence of these calamities and trade interruptions, famine and disease reportedly claimed the lives of some 15,000 slaves.<sup>38</sup>

Planter indebtedness and absentee proprietorship contributed to the harsh treatment of slaves, and indirectly made the island more dependent upon the slave trade. Wartime losses and fluctuations added to the indebtedness which had become substantial by the eve of the American Revolution. The Assembly of Jamaica reported in 1792 that, in the course of twenty years, 177 estates in the island had been sold for the payment of debts, 55 estates had been thrown up, and 92 were in the hands of creditors.<sup>39</sup>

The slave revolt in the great colony of Saint-Domingue, which raged for twelve years (1791-1803) and culminated in victory of the blacks over the army of Napoleon, could not help but have repercussions on other slave societies. White Jamaicans feared that the spirit of revolution might spread among their slaves. Black Jamaicans were certain to hear of the conflagration from slaves who came to the island with their French masters.<sup>40</sup> Hysterical whites exaggerated an incident involving the Maroons into inter-necine war in 1795. Trouble began with the flogging of two Maroons who were charged with stealing several pigs, which led to threats of vengeance and the calling up of a detachment of mounted troops to reinforce the local militia. Governor Balcarres believed the Maroon unrest was connected with the revolution in Saint-Domingue and that the slaves in Jamaica were being incited to general revolt by the Maroons. The upshot was the deployment of some 1500 European troops and more than twice as many local militia against some 300 Maroons who were only defeated when bloodhounds and their handlers were brought over from Cuba.<sup>41</sup>

From an economic standpoint, British Caribbean planters benefitted at the expense of their French counterparts in Saint-Domingue. On the eve of the slave revolt in 1790, the French colony had 792 sugar estates, 2,810 coffee plantations, and other properties which were worked by some 455,000 slaves who produced as much as the British Caribbean colonies combined. The destruction of this great colony reduced supplies and resulted in a rapid and marked rise in the prices of tropical commodities. In the space of five years coffee prices more than doubled on the London market, while raw sugar prices rose about twenty percent. Slave prices in Jamaica, which averaged £45 sterling in 1792-95, rose to £58 in 1796-99.<sup>42</sup>

Meanwhile, pressure was building up in England to reform slavery and the slave trade. William Wilberforce, the antislavery leader, made a number of propositions

regarding the slave trade in the House of Commons in 1789. Among other things, he said: 'That the present system rendered it more profitable for the planter to import Negroes from Africa than to rear an infant in the colony. That these profits were abominable, as they were the price of blood. And, finally, it could be proved that no considerable disadvantage would be experienced ultimately by those who were interested in the trade, if all further importation were prohibited.'<sup>43</sup>

Jamaica embarked on a new policy of recruiting her slave population in 1788, when the first consolidated slave code was adopted by the island government. Among other things, it provided that the government should give the overseers of plantations twenty shillings for every child they raised to twelve months of age. More comprehensive in scope was the slave code of 1792. In his analysis of this law, George W. Roberts writes that it "aimed at stimulating fertility by affording the slave owner tax remission in respect of births to his slaves and more directly by making child-bearing less burdensome on the female slaves. But these efforts were not limited to activities of this nature, which, in a sense, may be construed as state aids to reproduction. The planters themselves offered incentives to their female slaves."<sup>44</sup>

Fears engendered by the slave revolt in Saint-Domingue may have helped to strengthen the new policy of reproduction, for Jamaican planters believed that island-born or Creole slaves were less prone to run away and rebel than African-born or Salt-Water slaves. Not only were measures taken in an attempt to reduce the ratio of Salt Water to Creole slaves, but also an Act of the Assembly sought to reduce the ratio of older to younger African slaves. By the Act of 23 December 1797, a duty of ten pounds was imposed on every slave above the age of twenty-five years imported into Jamaica. Governor Balcarres wrote that long experience had shown that young blacks were more easily reformed of 'the vicious habits they imbibe in Africa than old Negroes who are in general the people who have hitherto promoted rebellions and rebellious conspiracies among the other slaves.'<sup>45</sup>

Slave trade statistics suggest that little or no progress was made in implementing the policies of amelioration and reproduction. Indeed, slave imports during the 1790s far exceeded those of any previous decade (143,825, as compared with 84,441 for the 1780s.) Retained imports were also high (122,331), since the re-exported slaves were slightly less in the 1790s (21,494) than they had been in the 1780s (21,806). The number of slaves imported into Jamaica rose to an all-time high of 23,018 in 1793, after which they ranged from 7,970 to 19,300 during the remainder of the decade.

Counteracting the measures to encourage reproduction was the incentive to increase slave imports during the years of booming coffee and sugar prices. The experience of Worthy Park estate was probably typical of large sugar plantations during the 1790s. The slave population of this estate increased by purchase from 318 in 1783 to 357 in 1791, during which time 43 children were born into slavery and 74 slaves died. By contrast, the population increased from 359 in 1792 to 470 in 1796, when 48 slaves were born and 137 died. Massive purchases of new slaves, including 144 in 1792 and 81 in 1793, were made during the boom years. 'Almost immediately the death-rate rose dramatically,' write Michael Craton and James Walvin, 'and at the end of the three years' seasoning of the new slaves almost a quarter of them had perished.'<sup>46</sup>

Parliamentary pressure waxed and waned during the decade of the 1790s. Prior to the revolt in Saint-Domingue, momentum had built up to prohibit the Atlantic slave trade. Britain was said to have access to alternative sources of tropical produce in the East Indies, while Britain's rivals in the Caribbean might be dealt a severe

blow by prohibiting the slave trade. Parliament came within a few votes of enacting such a measure in 1792, but the following year saw the British military expedition against Saint-Domingue which gave promise of expanding the trade in human chattels.<sup>47</sup>

Parliament returned to urging policies of amelioration and reproduction upon the colonies in 1797. In an address of 6 April of that year, the House of Commons requested the King to direct the governors in the West Indies to recommend to the councils and assemblies measures calculated to encourage 'the natural increase of the Negroes already in the islands, gradually to diminish the necessity of the slave trade, and ultimately to lead to its complete termination.'<sup>48</sup>

New Parliamentary restrictions on the slave trade fired the resentment of the Assembly of Jamaica, which complained in 1800 that the measure would result in a very great rise in the price of slaves in colonial markets. Moreover, the Assembly maintained that the state and condition of the slaves in Jamaica had of late years been greatly improved, but that the measures of amelioration and reproduction must be adopted gradually in order to facilitate the effect and purposes intended.<sup>49</sup>

That the period from 1801 to the Parliamentary prohibition of the slave trade in 1808 was too short to achieve the new policy is evident from the statistics of the Jamaican slave trade. Total imports during the last seven and a fraction years of the trade amounted to 66,385, re-exports to 7,880, and retained imports to 58,505. During the same period slave deaths exceeded slave births in Jamaica by 41,772. Thus the population increase of some 13,000 came entirely from imported Africans. Indeed, the slave population declined after the trade was prohibited, falling from 319,351 in 1807 to 309,167 in 1834. Thus slavery on the sugar plantations of Jamaica was incompatible with a self-reproducing labor force.<sup>50</sup>

## VI

By concentrating on the Jamaican slave trade in three critical decades of the eighteenth century, at the same time that long-run trends have been delineated, it has been possible to show both uniform and unique elements and their interactions. Persistent features of the slave trade and slave society include the inability of the population to maintain itself with a need for annual recruits from Africa, dependence on imported foodstuffs and other supplies, the low ratio of whites to blacks, the constant threat of slave revolt, and the general profitability of slavery and the slave trade from a business standpoint. On the other hand, the slave trade was highly volatile, being affected by war and peace among the peoples of West Africa, international wars, fluctuations in sugar and coffee prices, the intensity of demand from re-export markets, credit terms, the level of duties, natural disasters, and movements to achieve democratic and humanitarian reforms. Numerous interest groups vied with one another to reap the gains of the trade in human chattels and the economy it buttressed.

Jamaica was probably as much a trading colony as a plantation colony in the decade of the 1730s when the *Asiento* trade in slaves and manufactures was both highly profitable to a handful of South Sea Company officials and dangerously divisive. The sugar recession, the First Maroon War, and the slave trade were interrelated, with one connecting link consisting of the additional duty on slave imports and re-exports. As the Maroon War subsided after 1736, Spanish attacks on English shipping mounted until full-scale war commenced in 1739.

By contrast with the 1730s, Jamaica was generally prosperous during the greater part of the decade of the 1770s. The slave trade expanded during the middle years

of the decade. Both domestic and foreign market demand increased, but chiefly the former. Jamaica was both the preferred slave market and the market of last resort in the British Empire, at a time when a credit crisis and colonial discontent in North America impaired alternative markets for slaves. Glutted markets and wartime shipping losses greatly curtailed the slave trade after 1776. Meanwhile, a debate on the morality of the slave trade and a localized slave insurrection plot gave white Jamaicans occasion to reflect on their peculiar institution.

Paradoxically, the decade of the 1790s witnessed the implementation of policies of amelioration and reproduction and the attainment of new heights in the slave trade. After disastrous hurricanes and trade interruption in the 1780s, Jamaica entered a decade of prosperity in the 1790s when slave insurrection destroyed the great plantation colony of Saint-Domingue. Efforts to encourage reproduction were defeated by the high profits which could be achieved only by a large influx of African workers. But the prosperity was dampened by the Second Maroon War, the fear of general insurrection, and the diversion of resources to military campaigns. In the final analysis, Jamaica after 1807 entered a period of slavery without the slave trade, lacking a viable labor force and having to defend its peculiar institution against a growing chorus of critics.

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