

## ABSTRACT

"THAT LITTLE SHADOW OF PROPERTY AND FREEDOM":  
URBAN SLAVE SOCIETY IN JAMAICA,  
1780-1834

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This dissertation examines the structure of urban slave society and economy in Jamaica during the period 1780 to 1834, between the periods marking the heightening of anti-slavery agitation, to the abolition of slavery in the British West Indies.

Previously, historians have paid attention mainly to plantation slavery in the British West Indies and given little consideration to the approximately ten percent of slaves who lived in colonial port towns.

Within the context of the towns, slavery was transformed, and in many important ways diverged from the plantation model of slavery. Urban economic activity, demographic structure and social organisation rendered slavery unlike the originally conceived system of labour exploitation, which operated on rural plantations.

In response to the urban milieu in which it was located, slavery displayed its adaptability, and proved to be well suited to the demands of the urban economy.

The study explores the relationships between slaves and the other dominant social and economic groups in the urban context, and the extent to which the slaves were able to craft a viable existence within the fluid boundaries of urban society.

Evidence of urban slave life was garnered primarily from the newspapers published in Kingston and Spanish Town, from accounts by local residents and foreign visitors, and from a variety of official sources. Much of the evidence came from reports on slave marronage, which provided a range of data on the economic, social, and cultural aspects of urban slave life.

Though Jamaican urban slavery in many ways resembled that in other parts of the New World slave

system, it did have distinguishing features as a result of colonial Jamaica's peculiar economic and demographic structure.

The study attempts to demonstrate the extent to which urban slavery can be seen as one transitional point, or bridge, between colonial rural plantation society and the colonizing metropolis, and how urban slavery developed, in some respects, as an alternative to what, for most Afro-Jamaicans, was the disabling system of plantation slavery.