Research Note

Jamaica's Windward Maroon "Slaveholders"

Charles Town and Moore Town, 1810–20

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Abstract

This article is a quantitative analysis of data sets from 1810–20 related to Maroon "slaveholding" in the *Proceedings of the Honourable House of Assembly Relative to the Maroons*, which have been published in the *Journals of the House of Assembly of Jamaica*. Colonial officials in Jamaica identified some Maroons in the Charles Town and Moore Town census records as slaves or slaveholders. The data provide important insights into how bondage may have functioned in Maroon settlements. The data, in combination with an analysis of nontraditional slavery, suggest that slaveholding practices among the Maroons may have been influenced by West African cultural norms and opportunities that emerged on the Caribbean island of Jamaica. This scholarship contributes to studies of both the Maroons in the Americas and nontraditional slaveholding.

Keywords

Maroon – Jamaica – slavery – unfreedom – West Africa

In 1738/39, British official Colonel John Guthrie initiated a peace settlement with Captain Cudjoe of the Leeward Maroons and in 1739/40, with Captain

Quao of the Windward Maroons, after almost a decade of intense warfare between them and British forces made up of White, Indian, and Black antagonists. The peace treaties with Captain Cudjoe and Captain Quao de-escalated fighting and recognized the freedom of the Maroons living in these autonomous settlements of Jamaica's interior. In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, Jamaican Maroon communities were a source of apprehension and fear for the White plantocracy. Not only did the very existence of autonomous Black settlements represent a challenge to White authority, the Maroons actively supported slave rebellions and stood as a symbol of freedom and promise for enslaved peoples.¹ Thus the opportunity to bring Maroon leaders to the negotiating table was significant for asserting White control of the island. The 14-clause treaties set aside land for Maroon development, sought to regulate the physical mobility of Maroons, opened up the settlements to colonial supervision, and detailed Maroons' duty to prevent future slave uprisings.²

The clauses related to this last category have garnered the most attention from academics and nonspecialists alike and have been a source of contention in scholarly and popular discussions.³ However, sources that speak to the relationships between Whites and Jamaican Maroons and between the posttreaty Maroons and other Blacks on the island are problematic. White colonists, Jamaican Maroons, and non-Maroons were and are pressured by political agendas and master narratives. For their part, White colonists were not fully privy to the inner workings of Maroon communities; they were likely to misinterpret or misunderstand the practices they witnessed due to their Eurocentric,

- 1 This was much discussed in the colonial records. For example, in 1734, Governor Hunter of Jamaica complained that failure to suppress the Maroons had "such influence on [their] other slaves that they [were] continually deserting to them in great numbers and the insolent behaviour of others [gave them] but too much cause to fear a general defection." *Calendar of State Papers, Colonial Series* (Sainsbury et al. 1964) (hereafter *CSPCS*), #55, "Address of the Governor, Council and Assembly of Jamaica to the King," February 21, 1734. The Council and Assembly of Jamaica feared that the Maroons provided those enslaved on the island "all the hopes of freedom" and that they "only wait for an opportunity of joining them." *CSPCS*, #751, "Representation of the Council and Assembly of Jamaica to the Council of Trade and Plantations," March 11, 1734. Also see *CSPCS*, #627, "Governor Hunter to the Council of Trade and Plantations," December 24, 1730 and #486, "Governor Hunter to the Council of Trade and Plantations," November 13, 1731.
- 2 Public Records Office, Kew England, Correspondence, Original—Secretary of State, C.O. 137/56 Trelawny to Newcastle, June 30, 1739; Carey 1997:355–75.
- 3 See, for example, Campbell 1990. For examples of criticisms in a Jamaican newspaper see Dr. Orville Taylor, "Tacky above Some Heroes," *The Gleaner* (Kingston), October 13, 2014; Jerome Henry, "Tacky a Hero, Maroons Traitors," *The Gleaner*, October 18, 2013; and Shalman Scott, "Maroons Should Apologise (sic)," *The Gleaner*, October 21, 2005.

White supremacist viewpoints; and they were motivated to propagate negative images of the Maroons to shore up a sense of domination and White superiority in Jamaica and abroad. Non-Maroon sources suffer from many of the same shortcomings, especially the likelihood of misinterpreting data or evidence because they lack full access to Maroon histories. On the other hand, there is very little written about forms of slavery or bondage among the Maroons *by* the Maroons. Maroon intellectuals and activists are cautious about bringing the topic to the forefront of scholarly discourses because, when taken out of the larger context of nontraditional slavery, it can conflict with the carefully cultivated image of the Maroon freedom fighter.

As a consequence of the biased and fragmentary sources, the conclusions drawn here are tentative and hopefully serve as an invitation for further, multi-disciplinary inquiry. Freedom fighting—for one's own liberation or as a symbol to others—and bondage, once contextualized in the wider narrative of racial politics and nontraditional slaveholding, are not mutually exclusive. Nuanced interrogations of contemporary sources, scholarship on Jamaican Maroon communities, and comparative analysis of other kin-based societies together allow for a fuller understanding of Maroon interactions with other Blacks in Jamaica after 1740.⁴

This article is a quantitative analysis of the Maroons that colonial Jamaican officials identified as slaveholders and their bondservants in Charles Town and Moore Town, situated on the northeast region of the island, for the decade between 1810 and 1820. The period between 1810 and 1820 is the first decade for which there is a complete data set in the *Proceedings of the Honourable House of Assembly Relative to the Maroons*, which have been published in the *Journals of the House of Assembly of Jamaica* and is accessible at the National Library of Jamaica in Kingston.⁵ The colonial census records, which are sporadic until the ten-year period encompassed by this study, contain the names, approximate ages, and sometimes the gender of people that colonial officials listed as slaves and slaveholders. The study focuses on Charles Town and Moore Town because they had the largest recorded populations of “slaves” and “slaveholders” among the Jamaican Maroons. The “slaveholders” of Charles Town and Moore Town functioned as a middle ground between a “society

4 Lumsden 2002:467–89. Carey (1997:437) makes a similar argument.

5 *Proceedings of the Honourable House of Assembly Relative to the Maroons: Including the correspondence between the Right Honourable Earl Balacarres and the Honourable Major-General Walpole, during the Maroon rebellion. With the report of the joint special secret committee, to whom those papers were referred* (hereafter *Proceedings of the Honourable House of Assembly Relative to the Maroons*), *Journals of the House of Assembly of Jamaica*, Kingston, 1808–26.

with slaves” and a “slave society,” influenced by West African cultures and traditions as well as new opportunities in the Jamaican sugar colony.⁶ The data provided in these colonial records serve as a starting point for further analysis of how incorporation and bondage may have functioned in Maroon settlements and the relationships between Maroon “slaveholders” and their “slaves.”

It is unclear from the records whether the Maroons themselves referred to these people as “slaves” or by a range of terms signifying dependency, as was common in many kinship-based communities. In such societies, dependents were often distinguishable from free people and each other largely by their ability (or inability) to rely on their kinsmen for protection, return to their home communities, and by the intended length of the dependent relationship. The relationship between “masters” and their dependents and the status of those dependents in kinship-based societies could range from something closely resembling the basic form of chattel slavery as it was practiced on colonial American plantations to lineage incorporation through marriage and adoption.⁷ Maroons, as did other Blacks in the Americas during the colonial period, sometimes held friends and family members as “slaves” in order to protect them from the horrors of racial chattel slavery. In these cases, the “slaves” would have been slaves in name only, further complicating the meaning of the word (Carey 1997:432–438; Koger 1985:45–68; Woodson 1924:41–85).

The term “slave” is retained in this article for two main reasons. First, even when the majority of those in bondage were actually called slaves, the status and opportunities available to them ranged widely, even during the height of slavery in the eighteenth century. For example, whether someone in bondage was trained as an artisan and the son of a slave master or a recently arrived African field hand, both were recorded in official and personal records as slaves (Berlin 1998:29–93; Knight 2012:85–112). In other words, the range of slave statuses, opportunities, and treatments was not unique to kin-based societies. Second, “slave” is the term used in the colonial records—possibly because of what White officials witnessed or were told—and thus should not be jettisoned without further inquiry into the statuses and experiences of those who White officials put in this category. In recognition of the uncertainty surround-

6 See Berlin 1998:7–10 for a brief discussion of the distinctions between societies with slaves and slave societies.

7 For slavery in precolonial West African societies, see Manning 1990:110–25; Miers & Kopytoff 1977a; Perbi 2004; and Thornton 1992:72–97. Research related to slavery and its transformations among Native Americans in the Southeastern United States include Kraumather 2013; Perdue 1979; and Snyder 2007:255–88 and 2010.

ing the terminology, the words *slave* and *slaveholder* are put in quotation marks in this article, rather than replaced.

Maroon communities in Jamaica, such as those located on the Leeward and Windward sides of the island, were initially created by enslaved Blacks who ran away from their Spanish captors. They established settlements independent of White control in the mountainous interior or joined established communities of Taino Indians.⁸ Juan Lubolo and Juan de Serras are the two most well-known leaders of the Spanish Maroons in Jamaica and the peace treaties extended to both men in the late seventeenth century served as examples for negotiations with later Maroon groups.⁹ Lubolo and his followers settled in southwest central Jamaica, near Spanish Town, while De Serras and the “Varmahaly Negroes” established themselves in central Jamaica near the Cockpit country (Agorsah 1994b:165–68).

The English successfully conquered Jamaica from the Spanish in 1655. In order to fuel the burgeoning sugar plantation system, they soon began forcibly transporting larger numbers of Africans to the island.¹⁰ Enslaved Africans brought over by the British ran away and attempted to join the Spanish-era Maroons or create their own communities. This was especially common during times of warfare among Europeans in the Circum-Caribbean and during slave insurrections on the island. For instance, there were five major uprisings in Jamaica between 1673 and 1690. Historian David Buisseret asserts that Captain Cudjoe of the Leeward Maroons descended from one of the chief leaders of the revolt on Sutton’s plantation in 1690. Approximately 200 enslaved people escaped during that uprising, eventually mixing with what remained of the “Varmahaly Negroes” to form the Leeward group.¹¹

Charles Town and Moore Town, the focal points of this study, are both located in Portland parish—the northeasternmost parish in Jamaica (Agorsah 1994b:37, 169). The parish is bordered in the south by the Blue Mountains and

8 General studies of the Maroons include Carey 1997; Kopytoff 1973; and Robinson 1971. Recent scholarship on Maroons and Taino Indians includes a study by Fuller & Benn Torres (2018), which explores Maroons and Taino Indians from a scientific perspective.

9 The treaty is available at CSPCS, #416, “Proclamation of February 1, 1663,” Lyttleton to Board of Trade and Plantations.

10 Campbell 1990:1. The British imported 22,000 captives from Africa in the years 1651–75. That number increased to 94,000 in the last quarter of the seventeenth century. David Eltis, “A Brief Overview of the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade,” *Slave Voyages: The Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade Database*, <http://www.slavevoyages.org/assessment/essay> [accessed July 5, 2017].

11 Buisseret 2008:274–275; Carey 1997:149–51; CSPCS, #2991, “Council of Trade and Plantations to the King July 12,” July 15, 1731; and Dallas 1968 [1805]:22–26.

FIGURE 1 Maroon Settlements in Jamaica

ADAPTED FROM AGORSAH 1994B:166. THANK YOU TO DR. RYAN KIRK, ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR OF GEOGRAPHY AND ENVIRONMENTAL STUDIES AT ELON UNIVERSITY, FOR THE ADAPTATION.

on the northeast by the Caribbean Sea. The land is fertile, though mountainous and covered in dense vegetation, making it a suitable location for early Maroon settlement. There were several Maroon sites in eastern Jamaica by the early eighteenth century. Nanny Town was the main site, with satellite settlements established in Negro Town, Carrion Crow Hill, Guy's Town, and Crawford Town. The first grant of 500 acres made in 1740 by the Maroon Treaties of 1739/40 led to the establishment of New Nanny Town. Following a request from Nanny, a revered spiritual and military leader of the Windward Maroons, they finally received more land in 1782 and renamed the town "More Town," transcribed by White officials as "Moore Town."¹² Moore Town is situated about 10 miles south of Port Antonio along the Negro River. Charles Town, an offshoot of Crawford Town, is located west of Moore Town, along the Buff Bay River.

The social and cultural practices in Jamaican Maroon communities have always been in a state of change, weaving together Africa and the Americas. During the early colonial period of Jamaica's history, at the very time that the Maroon villages were forming, the majority of those enslaved on the island were born in Africa. Consequently, many of the earliest Maroons incorporated

12 Colonel C.L.G. Harris, "The True Traditions of My Ancestors" (Agorsah 1994a:37). In addition to the more general histories of the Maroons, see Carey (1997:351–54) and Gottlieb (2000) to learn more about Nanny.

the practices and worldviews of their homelands into the new societies they helped fashion. For instance, scholars have noted African influences in the Maroons' religious practices of *Obeah*, their musical instruments, particularly the *abeng*, and in Maroon languages.¹³ While evidence of Africa remains in the towns even today, a process of creolization is also undeniable as the Maroons created, adapted, and responded to historical events, social realities, and environmental factors.¹⁴ Comparative scholarship suggests that processes of creolization not only affected aspects of the culture such as music, language, and food but also transformed practices and norms around slavery and bondage in these communities.

Institutions of slavery are responsive to social, political, and economic events and opportunities. Historians Patrick Manning and Akosua Perbi have argued that slavery in West African societies became more exploitative as new markets for slaves and slave-produced goods emerged (Manning 1990:126–48; Perbi 2004). Similarly, Theda Perdue, Christina Snyder, and Barbara Kraumather point to the American Revolution, the Great Migration, and the Civil War as pivotal moments in the shaping of American Indian identities and catalysts for changes in captivity among indigenous communities in the United States. They argue that the enslavement of Black Americans in American Indian societies in the southeastern United States became more widespread and less inclusive of outsiders in response to social, economic, and political changes (Kraumather 2013:34–37; Perdue 1979:50–69, 96–118; Snyder 2010:182–212). Scholars have argued that even Blacks in the United States invested in slavery for economic gain by the middle of the nineteenth century, whereas it had previously served a more social role (Jackson 1942:224–225; Koger 1985:101–39). The treaties of 1738/39 and 1739/40 catalyzed changes in multiple aspects of Maroon life. Maroon descendant Bev Carey provided a comprehensive examination of the effects of the treaties on White colonists, the Maroons, and other Blacks in Jamaica. Barbara Kopytoff and Kenneth Bilby both note that the treaties had profound effects on political and social organization and on Maroon identity. Finally, I have previously argued, as has Helen McKee, that the treaties altered practices of bondage in Maroon settlements.¹⁵

13 African traditions in Maroon communities have been studied extensively; see Agorsah 1994a and 2014:87–107; Bilby 1992 and 2005; Campbell 1990; Dalby 1971:31–51; Schuler 1970:8–28; Thornton 1998:161–78; Zips 2011.

14 Besson 2016:59–98. Bilby 1983 contains an older, yet significant, discussion of the creolization of language explored through spirit possession among the Jamaican Maroons.

15 Carey 1997:397–426; Johnson 2015:160–88; Kopytoff 1976a, 1976b; McKee 2019:118–39. Kenneth Bilby (2005) examines the effects of the Maroon Treaties on Maroon heritage and culture.

Maroons navigated a middle ground between the traditions of their West African ancestors and the realities (and opportunities) of life on the sugar-producing island of Jamaica (Besson 2016; Diptee 2010). The relatively small size of the “slave” population, the stability of “slave” families, and the continuities in lines of ownership in Maroon towns intimate that masters saw their “slaves” as more than chattel. This was consistent with the types of bondage practiced in other kin-based communities during the pre- and early colonial period. Even if they had wanted to, the constant skirmishes between the colonial forces and Maroons prior to 1739 would have made it difficult for Maroons to effectively exploit a marginalized, and potentially hostile, slave labor force. Many of these circumstances changed following the Maroon Treaties of 1739/40. Jamaican Maroons finally had the security, mobility, and guaranteed access to land to more fully exploit slave labor. These factors, together with data from the *Proceedings of the Honourable House of Assembly Relative to the Maroons, Claims for Compensation Filed with the Assistant Commissioners for Jamaica*,¹⁶ and studies of the Jamaican Maroons, suggest that a) bondage among the Maroons changed over the course of the eighteenth century; and b) there likely existed an incorporative function with some reciprocity between “masters” and “slaves” among the Maroons.

To understand how forms of bondage may have functioned in Maroon communities, it is helpful to examine the forms of dependency in West Africa as a model. In pre- and early colonial West African societies categories of dependency corresponded to levels of inclusion. Junior kinsmen, children, and free-born wives represented free dependents. These free dependents had specific duties to the lineage appropriate for their ages and gender, and in return they received social and economic protections from their kinsmen. Meanwhile, clients and pawns characterized another form of dependency. Their connection to the host lineage was often based on a debt and their dependent relationship to the host canceled once the debt was repaid. This group was generally more vulnerable than those categorized as free, but they could capitalize on the influence of their own families to mitigate the worst types of mistreatment. The final category of dependents were slaves—some were born into slavery, some captured in warfare, and others purchased from outside of the community. The men and women in this category were completely reliant on the master and host lineage for protection.¹⁷ Quasi- and

16 *Claims for Compensation Filed With the Assistant Commissioners for Jamaica*, National Library of Jamaica, Kingston.

17 Miers & Kopytoff 1977b:3–81. Anthropologist Victor Uchendu introduced the term “commodity rights,” proposing that a person became a slave when someone acquired all of

unfree dependents were an important source of social and economic capital, which influenced their physical treatment and social opportunities. Nevertheless, they lacked full socio civil inclusion in the community and were often excluded from certain political offices and religious ceremonies (Perbi 2004:130–32).

Regardless of their privileges, roles, and treatment, the existence of a population living among the Maroons, called slaves by White officials, is well documented in the *Journal of Assembly of Jamaica* and the more comprehensive Maroon census records located in the appendices of the *Proceedings of the Honourable House of Assembly Relative to the Maroons*, especially by the nineteenth century. Between these two sources, there are records of “slaves” in Maroon towns for the years 1798 (with the exception of Accompong), 1799, 1801–3 and 1809–21. White colonial superintendents, who were granted access to the Maroon settlements as a stipulation of the Maroon Treaties, compiled these records. Though the documents are fraught with challenges—who applied the term “slave”; what did it mean to be identified as such; and were all the slaves actually accounted for in the records—they point to the presence of an “unfree” group of people in these communities.

Initially the information provided by the superintendents about these “slaves” was inconsistent. For instance, the superintendent in Moore Town only supplied the gender of the adults and a tally of children, and that only sporadically—in 1799 and 1801–3. Meanwhile, the superintendent of Charles Town included the names of the “slaves” during the same period. Thomas March, superintendent of Scot’s Hall, was even more detailed, providing the ages of the “slaves” as well as their names. Beginning in 1810, all the superintendents began recording the names of the people reportedly belonging to each Maroon, and in 1819 they began to record their ages as well. Two main points emerge based on the data gleaned from the colonial records between 1810 and 1820. First, Maroon “slaveholders” took advantage of opportunities in the early nineteenth century to increase the “slave” population in their towns. Second, colonial officials listed almost equal numbers of Maroon women and men as “slave owners.”

Unlike colonial Jamaica as a whole, the majority of the population in the Maroon towns was not enslaved. The recorded “slaves” never represented more than 12 percent of the population in Charles Town or Moore Town, which

his or her commodity rights; see Uchendu 1965:88. For additional scholarship on slavery in West Africa, see Campbell, Miers & Miller 2007; Haenger 2000; Manning 1990:110–25; Perbi 2004; and Thornton 1992:72–97.

FIGURE 2 Charles Town “slave” population, 1810–20

I have counted women as primary “slaveholders” when they are listed as the proprietor in the colonial records.

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averaged 273 and 330 free people, respectively.¹⁸ In comparison, almost 90 per cent of the total population of Jamaica in 1800 was enslaved (Higman 1984; Knight 2012:262). Furthermore, just ten years after the period of this study—in the years leading up to abolition—the median-size plantation in Jamaica held about 150 bondservants and 25 percent lived on plantations with, at least, 250 other enslaved individuals (Fogel 1994:21–23).

While “slave ownership” in Charles Town never approximated that of a Jamaican sugar planter, some people did amass relatively large numbers of “slave” dependents. According to the census records of the Assembly of Jamaica, there were 258 people living in Charles Town in 1810.¹⁹ Of these, there were five “slaveholders” in the town, all men, and four of them had held their

18 *Journals of the House of Assembly of Jamaica*, Census records for 1799, 1801–3, 1809–21.

19 *Journals of the House of Assembly of Jamaica*, Census records for 1810.

FIGURE 3 Moore Town “slave” population, 1810–20
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PROCEEDINGS OF THE HONOURABLE HOUSE OF ASSEMBLY FOR 1810–20*

“slaves” since 1801. Although there were two documented female “slaveholders” in 1801, none appear in the record as proprietors again until 1812. The two female “slaveholders” with the largest holdings of slaves were Fanny and Old Price, also known as Winday. The superintendents listed each woman as owning six “slaves.” The male “slaveholders” with the largest holdings were John Gordon, R. Bentham, and Thomas Bell, respectively holding seven, nine, and six “slave” dependents each.

An examination of the colonial records for Moore Town tells a similar story to that of Charles Town. Between 1810 and 1820, White officials noted 20 “slaveholders” in Moore Town, including the estates of deceased Maroons. While the documented “slave” population of Charles Town experienced dramatic fluctuations in absolute numbers and patterns of ownership over the decade between 1810 and 1820, those in Moore Town were much more stable. As indicated in the table below, the “slave” population of Moore Town steadily increased over the decade and the data reflect a consistent “slaveholding” pattern among both men and women. Moreover, there are no sharp deviations in “slaveholding” for either gender after 1813. Both men and women “slave owners” held

an average of 2.8 “slave” dependents in their households, though men held slightly more “slaves” overall than women—an average of 22.6 “slaves” for men and 18.7 “slaves” for women.²⁰

Again, the large-scale “slaveholding” was small by White colonial Jamaican standards, but noteworthy in a Maroon community. The two women with the most extensive “slaveholdings” were Quality Quasheba, who held as many as eight people recorded as slaves in the colonial records at one time during the period from 1810 to 1820, and Ann Mitchell, who had as many as nine. Major Phillips, who died sometime around 1820, was the largest male “slaveholder” in Moore Town. At one point, he too held nine “slaves,” followed by Samuel Phillips, who owned six. In sum, the Maroons of Charles Town and Moore Town held people categorized as slaves by White superintendents in increasingly larger numbers over the course of the decade.

There are striking commonalities between slavery and dependency in West Africa, colonial Jamaica, and among the Maroons of the island worthy of further investigation. For instance, African, White, and Maroon women had dependents, or slaves, in significant numbers. Women in West African societies tended to hold slaves for their labor and as a source of private property (Berger & White 1999:65; Jones 1995). Slaveholding records in the English colonies note that White women were central to capital markets and represented the majority of slaveholders in most urban centers (Beckles 1993; Butler 1995:92–109). Maroon women of Charles Town quickly joined the “slaveholding” ranks during the first decade of the nineteenth century, eventually owning 43 percent of the “slave” population. In 1814, there was a notable increase in the number of women “slaveholders,” which corresponded with a rapid decline in the number of men who owned “slaves.” Moreover, in Charles Town, women held greater concentrations of “slaves” than their male counterparts. For example, 12 of the 28 Maroon “slaveholders” between 1810 and 1820 were women. Of those 12 women, seven of them (58 percent) held two or more “slave” dependents at any given time. Only 43 percent of the male slaveholders—seven of the 16—held more than one “slave” during this period. Meanwhile, both men and women in Charles Town tended to have a slight preference for men when they had a single “slave.” Old Cuba and S. MacFarlane were the only “slaveholders” in Charles Town to own a single woman. Flora, whom colonial officials registered to Old Cuba, was 30 years old when she was first recorded in the census in 1813 and MacFarlane’s Hope did not have her age listed.²¹

20 *Journal of Assembly of Jamaica*, Census records for 1810–20 and *Proceedings of the Honourable House of Assembly* for 1810–20.

21 *Journals of the House of Assembly of Jamaica*, Census records for 1801, 1810, and 1812. Women in Charles Town held an average of 2.3 “slaves” to every 2 “slaves” held by men.

Although there were fewer “slaveholders” overall in Moore Town, slightly more than half of them—55 percent—were women.²² However, the ownership patterns of the female “slaveholders” of Moore Town diverges from their Charles Town counterparts in significant ways. While approximately 42 percent of the women “slaveholders” of Charles Town owned a single “slave” dependent for any period, that number increased to 77 percent in Moore Town.²³ Also different, most of those held individually by women in Moore Town were women. In 1810, two Maroon women each held an individual “slave” woman. That number doubled in 1811 to four women each owning an individual woman. According to the colonial records, Nancy Reader owned a single “slave” woman called Cretia for the entire decade of this study.²⁴ Meanwhile, Old Yabba held a man named Cato for a single year in 1810 before disappearing from the colonial register; and Nancy Harris owned a single male “slave,” Dublin, from 1816 to 1820.²⁵

A comparison of single-“slave” ownership between men and women in both Charles Town and Moore Town reveals an interesting pattern.

The women in both towns held “slaves” individually for short- and long-term durations. Men, on the other hand, were not likely to hold a single “slave” for more than a year. According to colonial officials, Robert Hines, D. Ball, and Adam Hopkins were the only male “slaveholders” to own a single “slave” for longer than a three-year period.

The similarities of those purported to be held in bondage by Maroon women, according to colonial sources, though not conclusive, suggest that female “slaveholders” in the Maroon towns held and used “slave” dependents in ways similar to their White and West African counterparts. This is significant for researchers for two main reasons. First, it adds valuable insight into studies of

22 11 of the 20 “slaveholders” were women. Pink Ball, a minor, is counted as a “slaveholder” separately from William and Phoebe Ball.

23 Though the Estate of Dido Hopkins is included in this percentage for listing only Eboe Sally in 1811, it is likely that she was not held individually. Eboe Sally was listed with her child, Industry, and a man named Will in 1810, 1813, and 1814. She and her child were then transferred to Peggy Bryce for the remainder of the decade.

24 Mary (Maria) Beckford held a woman “slave” from 1810 to 1811, while Abba Sambo owned a single female “slave” for the period 1811 to 1816. Nancy Harris is the only woman to have held a single man, Dublin, who was listed as her slave from 1816 to 1820.

25 The men of Moore Town held more in common with the men of Charles Town than their female counterparts. Approximately 55 percent of the men of Moore Town held “slaves” as individuals and owned single men and women in relatively equal numbers. Among other possibilities, Moore Town male “slaveholders” could have been eschewing the gendered preference of women “slaveholders,” or perhaps there were social norms in place that explicitly or *de facto* discouraged women from owning men.

FIGURE 4 Individual “slave” ownership
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colonial slavery, demonstrating that any inquiry lacking an analysis of female slaveholders is inadequate. Second, it is meaningful to those interested in developing the scholarship of female slave owners more generally, especially as a point of comparison and contrast in studies of nontraditional slaveholding.

Along with the practice of Maroon women holding “slave” dependents, the treatment and function of those “slaves” in Maroon settlements, especially by women, may have reflected the intersections of West African traditions and Jamaican realities. While the “slave-owning” women of Charles Town held a slight preference for male “slaves,” the women of Moore Town, like White Jamaican women, tended to have more women. The possible roles of these female “slave” dependents have been well documented on both sides of the Atlantic. Female slaves and dependents were primarily laborers who took care of household chores and produced goods for consumption and markets. They also provided childcare and elder care and served as a source of companionship. Moreover, the offspring of enslaved women were an important source of additional private wealth for their masters.²⁶ In both Maroon towns, the “slave” dependents of Maroon women were typically younger than those held by men. The average age for “slaves” belonging to Maroon women in Charles Town was 17.8 years old versus 20.8 years old for male slaveholders. The average ages of “slaves” in Moore Town are notably higher, yet the pattern of women holding younger “slave” dependents remains. The average age of “slaves” held by women in Moore Town was 22 years old, compared to an average of 28 years

26 Amadiume 1987; Jones 1996:101–11. There is debate about whether enslaved women were valued for their productive or reproductive abilities; see and Inikori 1992:117–66; Meillaux 1991; and Robertson & Klein 1983.

old for those held by men. Young, female dependents (slave, quasi- or *de facto* free) would have been ideal for providing labor and a source of capital for the Maroons.

Several tentative insights and conclusions can be gleaned from a comparative analysis of Maroon and other nontraditional “slaveholding” communities. The age, gender, origins, and talents of the enslaved as well as the whims of the slave owner shaped the treatment of slaves, on both sides of the Atlantic. Recently acquired captives in West Africa and the Americas were the most likely to suffer deprivation and dehumanization; there was a wide range of experiences for other slaves.²⁷ According to the theoretical framework put forward by historian Suzanne Miers and cultural anthropologist Igor Kopytoff, slavery in West Africa was one form of dependency in a continuum of interdependent relationships that people used to incorporate outsiders into their kinship networks. Reciprocal relationships between masters and slaves mitigated this dependency and served to protect slaves from extreme dehumanization (Miers & Kopytoff 1977b). Even though the social codification of reciprocity was less pronounced in colonial Jamaica, young slaves, locally born captives, and those who had a connection to the master through sexual or kinship relations were most likely to have opportunities to improve their social and material status (Knight 2012:85–112). Reciprocity allowed some slaves the chance to ameliorate their condition; it served to create a sense of obligation on the slaves’ part, demonstrated the seeming magnanimity of the slaveholder, and impeded the development of a slave identity.

There is a possibility that dependency and reciprocity played similar roles between “slaveholders” and “slave” dependents in Jamaican Maroon settlements. The Maroons had little reason to hold a large, marginalized slave population. Not only did they lack the land and markets to make large-scale production worthwhile, but they were themselves also a marginalized group within the White slaveholding colony. In other words, chattel-like slavery made little sense in these communities. Instead, bondage in Maroon settlements was probably a method of integrating outsiders into the community and lineage groups and exploiting additional labor sources. The data gleaned from colonial records show that most “slave” populations in Maroon towns were relatively stable and that Maroon slaveholders were unlikely to split up slave families or sell off slaves.²⁸ Through these consistent and sustained relationships slaves

27 Perbi (2004:130–32) identified many of the restrictions placed on enslaved men and women on the Gold Coast. See also Phillips 1991:43–61 and Turner 2004:303–22.

28 Johnson 2015:18. Based on data in the *Journals of the House of Assembly of Jamaica* for 1799, 1801–1803, and 1809–1821.

and other dependents became knowledgeable of Maroon norms, values, and customs and formed closer ties with their “masters.”

The stability, however, does not mean that Maroon “slaveholders” valued the reproductive capabilities of any chattel slaves they may have actually owned over their labor; based on their West African cultural roots and the Jamaican social context, they likely did not. Scholars are split on the importance slave owners placed on slave reproduction in West Africa; the consensus is clearer in the Americas. White slave owners valued slave births, but only when pregnancy, delivery, and childcare did not interrupt important production cycles (Bush 1990:36–45). If slave reproduction was paramount for Maroon “slaveholders,” we would expect to see higher numbers of “enslaved” women in Maroon settlements. For the Charles Town community as a whole, there was relative gender parity among those colonial officials categorized as slave—45 percent men, 43 percent women, 12 percent gender undetermined. There may have been a slight majority among “slave” women in Moore Town—45 percent—compared to 30 percent men and 20 percent gender undetermined.²⁹

While labor was undoubtedly an important part of life in Maroon towns, the Maroons may have differed from their Jamaican counterparts on how they assigned tasks. In colonial Jamaica, work was largely determined by race and color. There were tasks suitable for Whites—planter, merchant, artisan—on the one hand and then others—most notably fieldwork—appropriate only for enslaved Blacks. Though there were some slave-designated duties, bondservants in West Africa often worked alongside free and quasi free dependents at tasks determined by their demographic factors and skill sets, the status of their master, and the purposes for which they had been acquired. If anything, slaves worked longer and harder at the same tasks than their free counterparts (Miers & Kopytoff 1977b:29; Perbi 2004; Thornton 1992:85–88). As previously mentioned, Maroons lacked the conditions that would have made sharp divisions between the forms of labor appropriate for slaves and that of free people feasible or necessary, suggesting that Maroon slaveholders considered age, gender, and talent when designating tasks for their bondservants.

In conclusion, the size and demographics of the “slave” population suggest that the “slaveholders” of Charles Town and Moore Town functioned in a middle ground between a society with slaves stemming from their West African roots and a slave society influenced by circumstances in the Jamaican sugar

29 *Journals of the House of Assembly of Jamaica*, Census records for 1809–1821.

colony. While there are no surviving records written by Maroons during this time period that state why Maroons held people as “slaves” or how those people functioned in the community, I have proposed several theories based on an analysis of the colonial data and comparative scholarship. The data on “slaveholding” patterns in Charles Town and Moore Town demonstrate a diversity between Maroon settlements that is worthy of future study. Moreover, this research adds to the scholarship on the Maroons in the colonial period and traditional and nontraditional slaveholding in general. In particular, the analysis of “slaveholding” in each Maroon town corroborates the variety of patterns noted by scholars in studies of traditional slave owners. In addition, understanding the demography of the “slaveholders” and those categorized by White officials as slaves sheds light on the nature, function, and variability of slavery in the Atlantic World.

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