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The Apprenticeship System in the Caribbean

The World of the Apprentices

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Abstract

Slavery was abolished in the Anglophone Caribbean on August 1, 1834. On that date, the enslaved became legally free. However, the freedom of the enslaved was heavily circumscribed by the Apprenticeship system which followed immediately after August 1. Under the terms of this system, former slaves—now called apprentices—were required to work up to 45 hours per week for their former masters without compensation. Apprentices resisted the system at its outset; subsequently, they attempted to assert their rights as much as possible during the Apprenticeship period, even in the face of a highly oppressive system. Yet, like the enslaved, apprentices have left very little direct evidence in the form of letters or diaries. But because of their appearances before the stipendiary magistrates and in the reports generated about the Apprenticeship system, we can recreate aspects of their world and understand how apprentices sought to take advantage of Apprenticeship for their own benefit.

Keywords

apprenticeship – apprentices – Caribbean – stipendiary magistrates – manumission

1 Introduction

Slavery was abolished in the Anglophone Caribbean on August 1, 1834. On that date, the enslaved became legally free. However, the freedom of the enslaved

was heavily circumscribed by the Apprenticeship system which followed immediately after August 1st. Under the terms of this system, former slaves were required to work up to 45 hours per week for their former masters without compensation. Apprenticeship was intended to last up to six years, depending on the category of the apprentice. The legislation meant that praedials (former field slaves) would serve a six-year term of Apprenticeship while non-praedials (former skilled slaves and domestics) would be apprenticed for four years.¹

Thomas Holt has called this system “a half-way covenant,” since apprentices were required to do compulsory labor for 45 hours per week but were free to dispose of their labor outside of this time (Holt 1992:56–57). The legislators in Britain who created this system envisioned it as a way to bridge the gap between slavery and freedom: they were worried about the immediate transition to full freedom for the enslaved. As Padraic X. Scanlon has suggested, “Apprenticeship was meant to be an education, a balance between slavery and freedom that would protect the plantation economy and train up freed people into wage workers and former slaveholders into employers” (Scanlan 2020:310). The legislation establishing Apprenticeship also created specially appointed stipendiary magistrates to oversee the system: they were given the role of adjudicating disputes between apprentices and their former masters. Appointed largely from Britain, stipendiary magistrates were required to hold court once a week and to visit plantations with over ten apprentices every two weeks. In addition, the Apprenticeship bill removed the power of corporal punishment from the former enslavers and transferred it to the stipendiary magistrates (Scanlan 2020:311–12).

Apprentices had significant problems with this system. Many of them believed that they were free and found it difficult to accept the continuation of compulsory labor. As a Wesleyan missionary in St. Kitts reported, there was a basic incongruity about Apprenticeship:

it was difficult to make [apprentices] understand how they could be “discharged of and from all manner of slavery, and absolutely and fore ever manumitted,” and yet to be compelled to work the greater part of their time for the same masters without adequate wages. Freedom and com-

1 The most comprehensive treatment of Apprenticeship remains Burn 1937. See also Eudell 2002; Green 1969:44–66 and 1976; Hall 1953:142–66; Holt 1992; Marshall 1985:203–24; Paton 2004; Scanlan 2020; and Wilmot 1984:2–10. See also Lightfoot 2015, which deals with a plantation colony in the Anglophone Caribbean that rejected Apprenticeship.

pulsory labour, without payment and for no crime, appeared to them incongruous.²

Apprentices therefore resisted the system at its outset; subsequently, they attempted to assert their rights as much as possible during the Apprenticeship period, even in the face of a highly oppressive system. As in the case of Cuba 50 years later, Apprenticeship was neither another system of slavery nor did it fundamentally alter slavery; instead, it was “an ambiguous institution.” This was also the case in Suriname, where Apprenticeship lasted ten years, beginning in 1863, and in Puerto Rico, which had an Apprenticeship system from 1873 to 1876.³

This article argues that apprentices consequently used the establishment of Apprenticeship to improve their lives as much as possible; it therefore explores the ways apprentices sought to take advantage of Apprenticeship for their own benefit. Yet, like the enslaved, apprentices have left very little direct evidence in the form of letters or diaries. But because of their appearances in the stipendiary magistrates’ courts and in the reports generated about the Apprenticeship system, we can seek to understand the perspective of the apprentices and recreate aspects of their world.

2 Early Protests against Apprenticeship

Even before the onset of Apprenticeship, there were early signs of trouble. In St. Kitts, for example, the enslaved indicated that they would resist Apprenticeship and would strike on August 1, 1834. As they explained to the lieutenant-governor of the island, J. Lyons Nixon, they would “only work for wages, and that they will dictate terms, being convinced from the King’s Proclamation that they are to have unrestricted freedom on the 1st August next.”⁴

2 *British Parliamentary Papers* [hereafter *PP*], 1833–1835, Part 2, 278–2, 50, MacGregor to Spring Rice, 19 August 1834, no. 207, Enclosure no. 8; James Cox to MacGregor, 18 August 1834, p. 83.

3 For an important discussion of a similar system in Cuba 50 years later, the *patronato*, and the initiatives of Cuban apprentices (*patrocinados*), see R. Scott 2000 (1985), Chapter 7 (quote from p. 139). Pieter Emmer (1993) discusses Apprenticeship in Suriname, while Daniel Morales-Armstrong (2023) deals with Apprenticeship in Puerto Rico. Diana Paton (2004:56) described Apprenticeship somewhat differently; for her, it “operated as neither slavery nor free labor but as a third form of labor relations.”

4 *PP*, 1833–1835, Part 2, 278–2, 50, Nixon to Stanley, 10 July 1834, no. 198, p. 63. See also Shelton 1995:331–45.

Faced with this outburst, Nixon toured the island, speaking to Blacks from every estate in St. Kitts. The lieutenant-governor sought to clarify the basic provisions of the system and also emphasized the importance of the enslaved continuing to work after the abolition of slavery. However, his addresses to the Blacks failed to calm them; on the contrary, they were hostile and in at least one instance threatened an overseer with violence. As Nixon reported it, the people in two parishes near the capital were

highly insubordinate and disgraceful. They *una voce* protested against the apprenticeship system, declaring their resolution to resist it, and not to work after the 1st of August without wages, saying that on that day they were to be free, as announced by the King's proclamation, and that their masters could not take their houses or provision-grounds from them, having so long occupied them.⁵

Elsewhere in the Caribbean, there were also serious difficulties among the apprentices at the onset of Apprenticeship. In Trinidad, the apprentices vowed to strike and reiterated some of the same themes as the apprentices in St. Kitts. According to the lieutenant-governor of Trinidad, the apprentices there could not understand how the king could call them "free" and yet force them to work without pay for their former owners. Moreover, by refusing to work, the apprentices in Trinidad believed that they would be freed.⁶ The hostility toward Apprenticeship was equally strong in British Guiana. In Essequibo, one of the provinces of the colony, apprentices occupied a church and a churchyard for three days from August 9, flew flags and generally sought to encourage apprentices in the area to resist Apprenticeship. Some of the apprentices insisted that they would do no more than half of the work they had done when enslaved, since they understood this to be the "King's order."⁷ One of the spokesmen of the apprentices, Frederick, was reported to have said that "they were all free men now, and would not return to be bound, nor would they work but

5 *PP*, 1833–1835, Part 2, 278–2, 50, MacGregor to Spring Rice, 21 July 1834, no. 200, Enclosure no. 1; Nixon to MacGregor, 10 July 1834, p. 66.

6 *PP*, 1833–1835, Part 2, 278–2, 50, Hill to Spring Rice, 7 August 1834, no. 301, p. 202; The National Archives [hereafter TNA] Kew, London, Colonial Office Series [hereafter CO] 295/103, Hill to Spring Rice, 7 August 1834, no. 7, Enclosure: Extract of a private letter from Hill to Spring Rice, 7 August.

7 *Supplement to the Royal Gazette*, 13–20 September 1834; *PP*, 1833–1835, Part 2, 278–1; Smyth to Spring Rice, 9 Aug. 1834, no. 113, p. 156; Extracts from a Despatch from Smyth to Spring Rice, 12 October 1834, p. 179.

for wages.”⁸ Other apprentices did not believe the authorities’ description of Apprenticeship. Although the rector of one of the parishes in Essequibo laid out the terms of the new law, one of the apprentices said: “we do not disbelieve you; you will read the paper they give you, but they give you the wrong paper; Mr. Bean [a planter and a magistrate] give you his own paper.”⁹

In Jamaica, the situation was also difficult. In the parish of St. Ann, apprentices went on strike, vowing not to work except for wages. One report claimed that the apprentices swore that, “they will have their heads cut off, or shot, before they will be bound as apprentices.” As in other parts of the Caribbean, apprentices questioned whether the king could be responsible for the legislation or whether, instead, it emanated from Jamaica. They asked the authorities a series of rather telling questions:

1st. Is it the King’s law? 2d. Would you swear that the King make it? 3d. Did not the Jamaica House make it? 4. Did not Lord Sligo put him name to it because him have slaves? 5. Could you swear it is the Law of Jesus Christ?

Apprentices also maintained that Lord Mulgrave, the governor of Jamaica from 1832 to 1834, had proclaimed that the enslaved were to be free on August 1 and that slavery would then come to an end. As a result, apprentices said “that they never will make them good King William and Mulgrave ashamed by going to work and again be bound to their masters.”¹⁰ In many cases, apprentices refused to do any work outside of the time required by the Abolition Act. One planter in Jamaica asked his apprentices if they would keep the factory on the plantation working during breakfast and dinner, but the apprentices said: “No, they would go by the Law.” Other apprentices claimed that by working in their own time for the planters, they would “perpetuate their slavery.”¹¹

In addition, apprentices were sometimes reluctant to follow the advice of their own headmen who were encouraging apprentices to follow the rules on Apprenticeship. In one case, the head driver of an estate, Peter Symms,

8 *The Royal Gazette of British Guiana*, 27 September 1834, Report of the Supreme Criminal Court, Guiana Public Buildings, 23 September, Evidence of Charles Bean.

9 *PP*, 1833–1835, Part 2, 278–1, Extract from the Criminal Note Book of the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court of Demerara and Essequibo—Eleventh Criminal Session, Evidence of John Halloway Duke, p. 195.

10 *Postscript to The Royal Gazette*, 2–9 August 1834.

11 *PP*, 1833–1835, Part 1, Jamaica, 177, Sligo to Spring Rice, 29 November 1834, no. 22, Enclosure: Examination of Mr. Thomas Glen; National Library of Jamaica [hereafter NLJ], Sligo Papers, Sligo Private Letter Book, MS 281, Sligo to Spring Rice, 12 October 1834.

sought to explain the terms of Apprenticeship to the apprentices, but they did not believe him, despite Symms having been a driver for 14 years. As Symms reported to a committee of the Jamaica House of Assembly:

I have taken the greatest pains, assisted by a man named William Smith, who can read, in explaining to them under the new law they must behave themselves, be sober and obedient, or else when the apprenticeship is up they would not be able to get employment, but be turned off the property and left destitute; but they replied that William Smith and myself had made a bargain with Busha [overseer or owner] to make them fools.¹²

There was another level of protest that was more generalized and more difficult to control. James Scott has described this behavior of peasants in terms of “hidden transcripts,” using “foot-dragging” or “poaching” as part of an everyday form of resistance. Apprentices in Jamaica employed such tactics. Governor Sligo commented on the reaction of many apprentices who were unhappy with the new system: they resorted to “turning out late, irregularity to work, and idling of time.” To some degree, these “delinquencies” were dealt with by the special magistrates, but there was the additional problem of what planters perceived as “insolence and insubordination.”¹³

The reaction of the apprentices in the first year of the Apprenticeship was highly revealing. It was clear that their image of freedom differed substantially from those of the policymakers in the Colonial Office as well as their former masters. For the apprentices, and especially those who resisted the establishment of Apprenticeship, it was difficult to comprehend the new system. The apprentices felt that they needed no “apprenticeship”; they needed no training for freedom or for their work on the plantations. In fact, the nature of the slaves’ own economy in the Caribbean, with its extensive provision-ground system and highly developed markets, meant that the enslaved were probably better prepared for freedom than their former masters.¹⁴ At the onset of Apprenticeship, ex-slaves wanted to be fully free: as Woodville Marshall has suggested, they sought to take full control of their labor time and of their own lives. Moreover, it was important for them to reconstitute their families and practice their reli-

12 *PP*, 1833–1835, Part 1, Jamaica, 177, Sligo to Spring Rice, 29 Dec 1834, no. 28, Enclosure: Report of a Committee of the House of Assembly—Extracts from the Examination of Peter Symms, 26 Nov 1834, p. 104.

13 J. Scott 1990:xiii; TNA, CO 137/215, Sligo to Glenelg, 5 March 1836, no. 362, Enclosure: Murchison to Nunes, 1 March 1835.

14 For an important collection on this theme, see Berlin & Morgan 1991.

gions. Apprentices therefore sought unrestricted freedom and not a system of forced labor, even for part of the week.¹⁵

3 Apprentices' Responses to Apprenticeship: Complaints, Manumission, Resistance

In addition to the problem of compulsory labor, apprentices faced huge obstacles in a system that was heavily weighted in favor of the planters. A stipendiary magistrate in Jamaica, Edward Dacres Baynes, blamed the planters for their often-harsh treatment of the apprentices:

Close observation, and the experience of three years, justify me in expressing my opinion, that less blame attaches to the apprentices than to the masters; for the unfortunate position in which they now relatively stand; the total want of conciliation on the part of the latter; the indifference, too general, to the bodily comfort of his dependent; the distressing apathy manifested towards his moral improvement; the rigid exaction of the whole law from him, with the imprudent and discreditable anxiety too often exhibited for the infliction of its severest penalties, have produced the corresponding and inevitable result, by rendering the negro,—instead of confiding, satisfied, and cheerful—suspicious, reserved and discontented.

Baynes pointed to the overwhelming advantages of Apprenticeship for the planters, especially the six years of forced labor and the compensation money paid by the British government to the owners of enslaved labor.¹⁶

In his report, Baynes detailed some of the difficulties the apprentices had to confront. Many planters stopped providing the food allowances they had customarily given to the enslaved and organized the apprentices' work time so that they did not have a half day on Fridays to cultivate their provision grounds. For Baynes, this put the apprentices "as regards time and the means of subsistence in a worse condition than when [they were] slaves." Even more serious was the practice of local magistrates—often planters themselves—of illegally confin-

15 Marshall 1993:18. There were also disturbances in Puerto Rico at the onset of Apprenticeship in 1873; see Morales-Armstrong 2023:4–5. By comparison, in Suriname, apprentices were paid for their work and could decide where they worked; see Klinkers 1997.

16 *PP*, 1837, Part 4 (1), Jamaica, Barbados, British Guiana, 521, Lionel Smith to Glenelg, 12 June 1837, no. 575, Enclosure 2: Edward Dacres Baynes to C.H. Darling, 14 April 1837, p. 313.

ing apprentices to the houses of correction across the island. Although planters no longer had the power of corporal punishment, local magistrates could order the flogging and punishment of apprentices in the houses of correction without an appeal to the stipendiary magistrates.¹⁷

The law also stipulated harsh penalties for offences committed by apprentices. For example, “indolence” and “carelessness” at work was punishable by 15 hours of additional labor. For further offences, the punishments included flogging and hard labor. This was comparable to the punishments of apprentices for vagrancy in Suriname where the authorities punished apprentices with fines or imprisonment with forced labor. In addition, the treadmill—an instrument designed to mete out justice—was often used by local magistrates as a means of torture, with apprentices forced to endure brutal flogging while on the treadmill.¹⁸

Yet despite these abuses, Apprenticeship had advantages for the apprentices, and they were well aware of the significance of their changed status. As one stipendiary magistrate, J. Harris, reported in Jamaica nearly two years after the start of the Apprenticeship system, apprentices “feel themselves possessed of the rights and privileges of free men.” Harris contrasted the apprentices’ demeanor with that of the enslaved: apprentices behaved more independently and without the fear and dread of punishment exhibited by the enslaved. A case in Barbados highlighted this development. A planter, identified by the stipendiary magistrate John Colthurst as Wm T, found one of his apprentices named John Toney in the process of disobeying his orders. Drunk at the time, Wm T assaulted Toney, who fought back and badly beat up his former enslaver. Colthurst found Wm T guilty of assault but only fined him a small amount in light of the beating he received and the actions of Toney. For Colthurst, it was significant that the apprentices were very pleased at his decision; during slavery, as Colthurst noted, Toney might well have lost his life as a result.¹⁹

This change was also reflected in the language of the apprentices: as Edward Dacres Baynes noted, “the apprentice is daily becoming more heedless of and

17 *PP*, 1837, Part 4 (1), Jamaica, Barbados, British Guiana, 521, Lionel Smith to Glenelg, 12 June 1837, no. 575, pp. 313–14.

18 Scanlan 2020:313; *PP*, 1838, Part 5, Jamaica (1), 154, Lionel Smith to Glenelg, 13 November 1837, no. 49, Enclosure 2: Report of George Gordon and John Daughtrey, 23 October 1837, supporting the allegations of James Williams of excessive flogging on the treadmill. Diana Paton highlights the abuses suffered by James Williams and other apprentices on the treadmill in *A Narrative of Events* (2001, Introduction). For Suriname, see Slootweg 1987:77–78.

19 *PP*, 1836, Part 3 (1), Jamaica, 166–1, Sligo to Glenelg, 2 April 1836, no. 207, Enclosure: J. Harris to Sligo, 30 March 1836, p. 326; Marshall 1977:118.

more disrespectful to his manager.” According to Baynes, apprentices were no longer willing to accept the language of their former owners without an appropriate retort.²⁰ For example, a plantation constable complained in 1837 that an apprentice named Walter Taylor was not doing his work. The constable warned Taylor “not to give [him] any jaw” [verbal retort], but Taylor responded: “Who are you? Are you the Lord Jesus Christ, that I am not to give you any jaw?”²¹ In St. Kitts, the manager of Spooner Estate, Murdock McLeod, complained that the driver, Frederick, was drunk and unable to do his job. McLeod asked Frederick, “what was the matter with your eyes, they look red, to which Frederick replied yours look rather blue.” The stipendiary magistrate, Ralph Cleghorn, confirmed that Frederick was drunk and sentenced him to receive 12 stripes.²² On another estate in St. Kitts, the manager brought a complaint against several women, including Rachel, for riotous conduct and behaving insolently to the auxiliary constable, Hamlet. According to Hamlet, Rachel was examining a bird’s nest instead of doing her work. When Hamlet told her to get back to work, Rachel replied, “oh, poh, don’t bother me.”²³ Elsewhere in St. Kitts, an apprentice named Henry claimed he was sick and unable to work. When the manager of the estate ordered Henry to go the sick house on the estate, Henry demonstrated an understanding of the law by pointing out that was all the manager could do to him. And once inside the sick house, Henry told the manager that “he was no Congo boy to be treated in that way; he was a man like myself and he would be damned if he would be treated in that way.” The stipendiary magistrate admonished Henry and dismissed the case.²⁴ In another case, a manager in Barbados, Mr. Graves, sought to bribe the stipendiary magistrate John Colthurst with the gift of the alcoholic drink sling and some sugar canes. When Colthurst returned the gifts to Graves, the apprentices on the estate mocked the manager whenever he appeared in the field with a song whose chorus was “sling, sling, sling! ding, ding, ding! oh dear! oh dear!” (Marshall 1977:90). However, it was not just managers or constables who were

20 *PP*, 1836, Part 3 (1), Jamaica, 166–1, Sligo to Glenelg, 2 April 1836, no. 207, Enclosure: Report of E.D. Baynes, 28 March 1836, p. 343. For an important discussion of the planters’ languages of insult and the responses of the apprentices, see Paton 2006:246–65. See also Ogborn 2019.

21 *PP*, 1837, Part 4 (1), Jamaica, Barbados, British Guiana, 521: Monthly Return of Complaints Brought Before Special Justice William Ramsay, during March 1837, p. 296.

22 St Kitts & Nevis National Archives [hereafter SKNNA], B7/21, Ralph Cleghorn, Feb–March 1835, McLeod v. Fred Anon, 24 February 1835.

23 SKNNA, B7/21, Stevens v Chloe, Rachel & Big Bella, 24 March 1835.

24 SKNNA, B7/21, R. Olpherts, Quarterly Journal of the Special Magistrate, no. 4 district, ending 30 September 1835, Rawlins v Henry, 1 July 1835.

verbally abused by apprentices but stipendiary magistrates as well. When Frederick White, a stipendiary magistrate in Jamaica, ordered Thomas Catney to be given 36 lashes for insolence and not going to work, Catney responded that White was “paid by the White Man & not by the King.”²⁵

Apprentices did not just respond verbally to their former masters; they also lodged many complaints against them with the stipendiary magistrates.²⁶ As a stipendiary magistrate in Jamaica noted in 1835, the apprentices “are themselves so tenacious of their newly-acquired privileges, that they take especial care to prefer complaints whenever they have occasion to do so.”²⁷ For example, three apprentices on Mount Vernon Estate in Jamaica complained to Frederick White that their master was “overworking” them. White upheld their complaint and ordered that they be given extra free time as a result. When apprentices on another estate in Jamaica told White that their master was not providing “the necessaries of life,” White admonished the planter and threatened to impose the heaviest fine possible if things did not improve.²⁸ The most common complaint was assault against apprentices, including minor infractions. For example, an apprentice named Hannibal complained that the overseer of an estate in St. Kitts threw a potato at him, removed a protective covering over his eye and called him “an old villain.” Stipendiary magistrate Cleghorn found the overseer guilty of a slight assault and fined him ten shillings.²⁹ Apprentices also complained about improper confinement in the stocks and having to work beyond the allotted time without payment. In a case in British Guiana, the apprentices on Cove Estate complained about receiving insufficient clothing and also about the state of their homes. In response, the stipendiary magistrate, K. Heyland, reported that “steps had been taken to make up the deficiency forthwith,” and he had allowed 14 days for the problem of the clothing to be dealt with. Heyland also noted that he had given the manager a month to improve the houses of the apprentices and that, significantly, the apprentices were satisfied with these arrangements.³⁰

25 Rhodes House [hereafter RH], Oxford, Diary of Frederick White, Stipendiary Magistrate, in Jamaica: 18 August 1834, p. 37.

26 This was also the case in colonies such as British Guiana during slavery. For an illuminating study of the role of fiscals and protectors of slaves in Berbice, see Browne 2017.

27 *PP*, 1836, Part 3 (1), Jamaica, 166–1, Sligo to Glenelg, 29 December 1835, no. 187–8, Enclosure: R.B. Facey to Sligo, 14 December 1835, p. 175.

28 RH, Diary of Frederick White, 6 August 1834, p. 3; 8 August 1834, p. 13.

29 SKNNA, B7/21, Ralph Cleghorn, Duplicate Journal for the Quarter ending 30 June 1835, Hannibal v Sindell, April 1835.

30 SKNNA, B7/21, 6 August 1834, p. 3; 8 August 1834, p. 13; *PP*, 1836, Part 3 (2), 30 March 1836: James Carmichael Smith to Glenelg, 30 October 1835, Demerara—Report of Special Justices: K. Heyland, Western Division, p. 79.

When overseers and others in charge of the apprentices did not respond adequately, stipendiary magistrates had the power to impose fines. These ranged from 20 shillings to a maximum of £5, but one planter was fined the unusually high sum of £25 for locking an apprentice in the stocks for five days. The manager of Hope Estate in St. Kitts, Joseph Trueman, had to pay an even higher fine of £50 for not taking proper care of his apprentice, Thomas Cook. Cook was the “doctor” on the estate but was himself ill. Trueman downplayed Cook’s illness, saying “it was all humbug work, he supposed complainant only wanted his wife to sit down in the negro house with him.”³¹ In a case in Demerara in 1836, the stipendiary magistrate fined a manager for not supplying proper allowances to his apprentices and for illegally putting an apprentice in the stocks. When the manager refused to pay the fine of £10, the magistrate jailed him for three weeks. It was also possible for magistrates to rule against overseers, despite their having initially complained about an apprentice. In a case in Jamaica in 1836, an overseer brought a charge of neglect and insolence against an apprentice, E. Robinson. But the magistrate acquitted Robinson and instead fined the overseer £2 for assaulting the apprentice.³²

Apprentices also complained about the system of classification that divided them as *praedials* and *nonpraedials*. At the outset of the Apprenticeship system, former masters were required to put their apprentices in either category. Most appear to have done so without consulting the apprentices themselves. Listing skilled and domestic slaves as *praedials* meant that the apprentices would be obliged to serve an extra two years as apprentices. In addition, former skilled slaves sometimes found themselves moved to field labor against their will. A stipendiary magistrate in Demerara, W.J. Brittain, reported a year after the onset of Apprenticeship that many apprentices had lodged complaints about this practice. According to Brittain, the planters did not deny these accusations but believed they had the right to move skilled apprentices to field labor, since they had registered the apprentices as *praedials*.³³

31 *PP*, 1837, Part 4 (1), Jamaica, Barbados, British Guiana, 521, Sligo to Glenelg, 15 July 1836, no. 537; List of Fines on Overseers and others in June, 1836, under the Abolition Act; extracted from Special Magistrates’ Reports, p. 101; SKNNA, B7/21, Ralph Cleghorn, Duplicate Journal for the Quarter ending 31 December 1835, Joseph Trueman v Thomas Cook: 26 October 1835, Decision, 2 November 1835.

32 *PP*, 1836, Part 3 (2), 30 March 1836: James Carmichael Smith to Glenelg, 28 October 1835, Demerara—Report of Special Justices: Upper River, George Ross, p. 76; *PP*, 1836, Part 3 (1), Jamaica, 166–1, Sligo to Glenelg, 6 February 1836, no. 197, Enclosure 1: Extracted from the Special Magistrates’ Reports, received in the Month of January 1836.

33 *PP*, 1836, Part 3 (2), 30 March 1836: James Carmichael Smith to Glenelg, 13 November 1835, no. 250, Enclosure B: W.J. Brittain to H.E.F. Young, 22 October 1835, p. 101.

In a case that Brittain forwarded to the attorney general of the colony, an apprentice named Mary had sought Brittain's help in dealing what she considered an injustice. Aged around 50 years old, Mary had served all her life as a domestic in the manager's house and had never worked as a field slave or in the production of sugar. According to the manager of the estate, Mary had disobeyed his orders and he had relegated her to work in the field and believed that he had a right to do so, since he had registered Mary as a praedial. Mary refused to work in the field, believing that she should not be compelled to do so and, in any case, was not capable at her age of field work. She appealed to Brittain to rule on her case and adjudge whether she was a praedial or non-praedial and, furthermore, whether she could be forced to work in field labor for the remainder of the period of Apprenticeship. There is no evidence about the outcome of this case, but it is clear that apprentices expressed their opposition to being improperly categorized and being assigned to serve the longer term of Apprenticeship inappropriately.³⁴

Mary was not alone in taking this action: many apprentices across the Caribbean were aware of their rights and of the possibility of appealing against their categorization. The governor of Barbados reported in the spring of 1838 that there were a considerable number of apprentices in the process of challenging their categorization.³⁵ The number of appeals on this issue reinforced the governor's view. In the three-month period from December 1837 to March 1838, there were almost 500 appeals of this kind, nearly 300 of which had been successful (Table 1). Going back to the summer of 1837, the figure was even more impressive: 877 appeals, of which nearly 570 had been successful, with some left to be decided.

Apprentices were also very concerned about their children. According to the Abolition Act, children under six years of age were free. For many planters, this meant that children were no longer of any use on their plantations; instead, young children were now regarded as a problem. Planters generally were no longer concerned about the welfare of these children and often did not want them on their estates. As a result, there was no effective training for free children or older apprenticed children for their future as citizens. As Colleen Vasconcellos has suggested, "as apprenticeship changed the nature of childhood in Jamaica, children shifted from investment to liability overnight."³⁶

34 *PP*, 1836, Part 3 (2), 30 March 1836: James Carmichael Smith to Glenelg, 13 November 1835, no. 250, Enclosure B: W.J. Brittain to H.E.F. Young, 22 October 1835, pp. 102–3.

35 TNA, CO 28/120, MacGregor to Glenelg, 30 December 1837, no. 291.

36 Vasconcellos 2015:94. This was also the case for Suriname during the Apprenticeship period, see Emmer 1993:95.

TABLE 1 Barbados—general return of appeals of apprenticed laborers transferred from the praedial to the nonpraedial class, December 1, 1837–March 1, 1838

District	Number admitted			Number rejected			Remaining	Total
	M	F	Total	M	F	Total		
A-TOWN/RUR	17	21	38	6	3	9		47
B-RURAL	16	33	49	7	6	13		62
C-RURAL	30	47	77	17	23	40	13	130
D-RURAL	8	28	36	8	4	12	6	54
E-RURAL	22	46	68	29	22	51	40	159
F-RURAL	5	18	23		4	4		27
G-RURAL		6	6				6	12
TOTAL	98	199	297	67	62	129	65	491

SOURCE: TNA, CO 28/123, FOLIO 40, APPEALS

But apprentices had a different view about their children. It was clear that apprentices “valued their children’s freedom above anything else in the world” (Vasconcellos 2015:91). Moreover, apprenticed parents, and especially mothers, did not want their young children to work in any form of field labor; on the contrary, apprentices preferred their children to be educated. As one stipendiary magistrate noted, apprentices regarded working in agriculture as “a degradation”: moreover, they believed that their children would never be free if they worked on the estates. The lieutenant-governor of Tobago, Henry Darling, was alarmed about this situation. Darling reported that apprentices “fear that any kindness, in the way of medical treatment or other indulgence, may be supposed to establish a claim on the part of the estate to their future services.”³⁷ Similarly, in St. Vincent, apprentices believed that if they allowed their children to work on the estates, they would “in some measure barter their rights to perfect freedom and some ... say that it is contrary to the Law of God.”³⁸

37 *PP*, 1837, Part 4 (1), Jamaica, Barbados, British Guiana, 521, Lionel Smith to Glenelg, 4 April 1837, no. 567, Enclosure 2: W.F. Marlton to Lionel Smith, 2 January 1837, p. 244; *PP*, 1836, Part 3 (2), 30 March 1836, Lionel Smith to Glenelg, 25 November 1835, no. 412, Enclosure 2: Henry C. Darling to Glenelg, 26 October 1835, p. 420.

38 TNA, CO 260/55, Tyler to MacGregor, 9 August 1837, no. 71: Report of Polson, 25 July, Second District.

This view was so strong among apprentices in Barbados that only one child out of 14,000 had been apprenticed to work on a plantation by 1837. The possibilities of education for the free children were often very limited, but where they existed, apprentices took advantage of them. At the Metropolitan School in Spanish Town, Jamaica, for example, 400 of the 600 pupils were the offspring of apprentices.³⁹

Female apprentices not only sought to protect their free children, but they were also at the forefront of resistance to Apprenticeship generally. In a letter to the colonial secretary, Governor Sligo included a report from a stipendiary magistrate in Jamaica who concluded that “the women are on all occasions the most clamorous, the most troublesome and insubordinate, and least respectful of all authority.” Echoing this view, Frederick White reported on the case of three women—Francis Passley, Elizabeth Browne, and Caroline Passley—who were charged with “insolence and refusing to work and otherwise bad disposed people exciting the rest of the women to rebel.”⁴⁰ In St. Kitts, the manager of an estate complained about four women who were repeatedly late for work. Three of them apologized but one of the women, Nanny, not only denied the charge but also “declare[d] her determination not to abide by any regulations or requests.” According to stipendiary magistrate Ralph Cleghorn, Nanny “manifest[ed] a decided spirit of opposition” and a habitual pattern of “pertinacious conduct.”⁴¹ Similarly, Betsey Williams, who was an apprentice on Hope Estate in St. Kitts, refused to go to work and told the manager of the estate that he would have to carry her to the field. A constable was sent to persuade her to return to her job as a cane cutter and threatened to take her to the sick house, but she refused. In sentencing Betsey Williams to ten days’ work for the estate in her own time, Cleghorn described her character as “violent and unruly” and noted that she “shew[ed] a great disposition to disobey orders.” Cleghorn also dealt with a case in which several women in a weeding gang refused to follow the orders of the driver to each take a row. According to the driver, they chose their own rows and when he ordered them to begin weeding, they “called out in a most riotous manner holloa! holloa!,” resisted his authority and abused him. The manager of the estate claimed that he had never heard such a racket in his

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- 39 TNA, CO 28/119, MacGregor to Glenelg, 4 April 1837, no. 69, Enclosure no. 76: Report of R. Boucher Clarke, 3 April 1837; *PP*, 1837, Part 4 (1), Jamaica, Barbados, British Guiana, 521, Sligo to Glenelg, 9 July 1836, no. 528, Enclosure 45: William Ramsay to Sligo, 3 July 1836, p. 83.
- 40 *PP*, 1836, Part 3 (1), Jamaica, 166-1, Sligo to Glenelg, 2 April 1836, no. 207, Enclosure: S. Pryce to Sligo, 29 March 1836, p. 314; Diary of Frederick White, 18 September 1834, p. 116.
- 41 SKNNA, B7/21, Ralph Cleghorn, Feb-March 1835, Stevens v little Bella, big Betty, Fanny & Nanny, 12 March 1835.

life.⁴² This flouting of authority was not limited to adult female apprentices. On another estate in St. Kitts, the driver of the second gang complained that a group of five girls ranging in ages from eight to 16 years old were impudent and negligent in their work and “sometimes [stood] up and laugh[ed] at him.”⁴³

The actions of female apprentices could also be dramatic: on the Kitty plantation in Demerara, about 25 women apprentices sought to rescue men on the plantation who had been convicted of not performing their work and sentenced to be whipped. As the stipendiary magistrate of the district reported, “the women have attempted to set all authority at defiance; the whole have combined together not to perform their work.”⁴⁴ Similarly in Jamaica, four women on the Gibraltar Estate had run away soon after the beginning of Apprenticeship for a week. According to White, these women had encouraged others “to rebel and [were] otherwise very insolent and going to work when they please and putting the driver in defiance.” At about the same time, two other women on another estate in Jamaica would not go to work when ordered to do so. The plantation constable not only gave evidence that this was the case but also said that the women “quitted the field and laughed at him for being a fool in trying to make them believe they had occasion to work.”⁴⁵

There were good reasons why women were so prominent in the resistance to Apprenticeship. As Thomas Holt has pointed out, female apprentices formed the bulk of the field laboring force on the plantations, just as they had during slavery. Regulations about hours and about working practices would therefore have affected women more directly than men (Holt 1992:64). For example, women with six children who were formerly exempt from field labor were now forced to work in the fields.⁴⁶ However, the explanation for the role of women as ringleaders against Apprenticeship is more complicated than simply numerical predominance. As Diana Paton has pointed out, women were frequently on the receiving end of verbal abuses as well as sexual violence meted out by planters and managers. Moreover, these insults were often directed at women’s bodies.⁴⁷ Mimi Sheller has added a further insight on women’s role in Jamaica during this period as both workers and mothers. As Sheller suggests, “unlike their male

42 SKNNA, B7/21, Ralph Cleghorn, Feb-March 1835, *Cantril v Betsey Williams*, 26 March 1835; Quarter ending 31 December 1835, *Hugh Ross v Charity et al.*, 30 October 1835.

43 SKNNA, B7/21, Ralph Cleghorn, Feb-March 1835, *Cantril v Betsey Williams*, 26 March 1835; Quarter ending 30 June 1835, *Frazer v Maria et al.*, 1 May 1835.

44 *PP*, 1836. Part 3, (2), 30 March 1836, *J.C. Smyth to Glenelg*, 12 November 1835, Demerara—Report of Special Justice Lyon, p. 91.

45 RH, *Diary of Frederick White*, 23 October 1834, p. 167; 25 August 1834, p. 56.

46 I am grateful to Bridget Brereton for this point (private communication).

47 Paton 2006:38–58; see also Turner 1999:38–58.

counterparts, female field laborers could make claims for improved working conditions not simply as free workers, but specifically as mothers who were struggling to support their families.” The planters’ withdrawal of privileges during Apprenticeship and specifically those affecting pregnant women, women with children, and the role of elderly matriarchs impinged directly on women: “female apprentices were punished in large numbers for trying to assert and protect the limited rights they had won as mothers of the slave labour force ...” (Sheller 1998:93, 94).

Women resisted Apprenticeship but they, like male apprentices, also sought to be manumitted. The Abolition Act stipulated that apprentices had the right to buy themselves out of Apprenticeship. However, the provisions of the act made this difficult: apprentices were to be valued by three magistrates, only one of whom was a stipendiary magistrate. The other two were colonial magistrates, men who often had apprentices themselves. The colonial magistrates frequently put very high valuations on the apprentices, overruling the stipendiary magistrates and making it difficult for apprentices to purchase their freedom. Because of this problem, a stipendiary magistrate in Barbados, Jos Hamilton, believed that three stipendiary magistrates should make the valuation. An anonymous letter to the Colonial Office, apparently from an apprentice, also complained about this situation. Writing from Barbados soon after the beginning of the Apprenticeship system in 1834, the apprentice criticized the oppressiveness of the system but specifically highlighted the exorbitant cost of valuation. The apprentice concluded that “there has been many apprentices buying their time but the Price is too much ... is paying more than they would bring without emancipation.”⁴⁸ There were additional impediments as well: in St. Vincent, for example, apprentices from more remote parts of the island found it difficult to get to the capital, Kingstown, where they had to appear before the chief justice. Apprentices in St. Vincent also had to pay \$2 to advertise their intention to apply for manumission in the island *Gazette*.⁴⁹

Despite the costs and difficulties, a significant number of apprentices were able to purchase their manumission. In Jamaica, for example, in the period from the beginning of November 1836 to the end of July 1837, over 1,000 appren-

48 TNA, CO 28/118, MacGregor to Glenelg, 10 November 1836, no. 17, Enclosure: Stipendiary Magistrate Report, Jos Hamilton, October 1836; CO 28/114, Anonymous letter to Spring Rice, 1 October 1834. An official in the Colonial Office, Henry Taylor, noted that if this letter was from an apprentice, it was the first such communication that the Colonial Office had received from either an enslaved person or an apprentice.

49 TNA, CO 260/56, Report of Stipendiary Magistrate John Colthurst, 31 March 1838, p. 366.

tices bought themselves out of Apprenticeship. They did so at considerable cost: apprentices paid a total of nearly £30,000 to be manumitted.⁵⁰ In some cases, apprentices borrowed money to pay for their valuations in return for promising to work for the borrower to repay the loan. As one stipendiary magistrate reported, this meant that apprentices were themselves choosing a different master. Some apprentices did so because they were unhappy with their former masters; others wished to be closer to members of their family. Whatever the reasons, there was little doubt that many apprentices wanted to be manumitted. As a stipendiary magistrate in Barbados reported in 1837, apprentices would seek “even one week of freedom” if they could manage it.⁵¹

Stipendiary magistrates also encouraged apprentices to make private agreements with their masters: in these cases, the payment was often much less than the valuations of the magistrates. This was particularly the case in Barbados. The stipendiary magistrate, J. Elmes, reported that the average amount paid for those manumitted by “amicable arrangements” in October 1836 ranged from £10 to £15, while those who went through the appraisal process paid more than double those figures. There were also significantly more manumissions by private agreements. For example, Elmes also reported in 1837 that there were 46 cases of manumission in his district, 31 of which were completed by “amicable arrangement.”⁵²

In addition, stipendiary magistrates could manumit apprentices when their masters mistreated them badly and in violation of the Abolition Act. John Colthurst manumitted a female apprentice who had been whipped by her master in a drunken rage and encouraged to do so by his wife. Because it was a double assault, Colthurst had the power to manumit the apprentice; in this case, the apprentice chose to be manumitted rather than having Colthurst impose a fine on the master (Marshall 1977:90–91).

50 *PP*, 1838, Part 5, Jamaica, 154–1, Lionel Smith to Glenelg, 11 December 1837, Enclosure no. 35: Valuations, p. 90.

51 *PP*, 1838, Part 5, Jamaica, 154–1, Lionel Smith to Glenelg, 8 September 1837, no. 65, Enclosure no. 50: Stipendiary Magistrate Report, H. Kent, 30 June 1837, p. 316; Enclosure no. 42: Stipendiary Magistrate Report, John Daughtrey, July 1837, p. 310; TNA, CO 28/119, MacGregor to Glenelg, 20 June 1837, no. 143, Enclosure: Stipendiary Magistrate Report, A. Robertson.

52 TNA, CO 28/117, Beckles to Glenelg, 12 October 1836, no. 6, Enclosure: Report of Stipendiary Magistrate J. Elmes; *PP*, 1837, Part 4 (1), Jamaica, Barbados, British Guiana, 521, Beckles to Glenelg, 21 September 1836, no. 613, Enclosure no. 1: Monthly Report—Town Division, 1–31 August 1836, J. Elmes, p. 385.

TABLE 2 Barbados, number of apprenticed laborers manumitted—1837

District	M	F	Praed	Non Praed	By appraise	By agree	Volun	Mag	Total
A-TOWN	155	268	75	348	36	146	241	2	425
A-RURAL	62	71	41	92	56	42	35	2	135
B-RURAL	65	98	59	104	70	31	62		163
C-RURAL	70	109	98	81	129	21	29		179
D-RURAL	20	26	31	15	45	1			46
E-RURAL	72	115	78	109	91	36	60	4	191
F-RURAL	22	23	30	15	40	5		8	53
G-RURAL		2		1	1		2		2
TOTAL	466	712	403	775	467	282	429	16	1194

SOURCE: TNA, CO 28/122, GENERAL RETURN OF APPEALS OF APPRENTICED LABOURERS FROM THE PRAEDIAL TO THE NON-PRAEDIAL CLASS, BARBADOS, 14 JUNE 1838

Once manumitted, few of the manumitted apprentices continued in field labor. As one apprentice was reported to have said, “Who ever hear of free work a field?”⁵³ In other words, what free person would ever choose to work in field labor? Most of the skilled apprentices continued at their trades, but many women left working as field laborers, preferring domestic work, trading as hucksters, or working on their provision grounds. Many apprentices moved to towns to hire themselves out as laborers while others bought land and became independent settlers.⁵⁴ There was also the possibility of mobility for apprentices: some were able to become bookkeepers on the estates, although at roughly half the salary of White bookkeepers. In one case in Jamaica, a manumitted apprentice became an overseer and was put in charge of the estate when the owner left the island. For the stipendiary magistrate who reported on this case, this showed “the estimation in which the competency of this class of persons is held, and the confidence reposed in their discretion.”⁵⁵

53 *PP*, 1838, Part 5, Jamaica, 154–1, Lionel Smith to Glenelg, 8 September 1837, no. 65, Enclosure no. 43; Stipendiary Magistrate Report, W.A. Bell, 2 July 1837, p. 310.

54 *PP*, 1837, Part 4 (1), Jamaica, Barbados, British Guiana, 521, Lionel Smith to Glenelg, 12 November 1836, no. 558, Enclosure no. 10; S. Reynolds to C.H. Darling, 4 October 1836, p. 188.

55 *PP*, 1837, Part 4 (1), Jamaica, Barbados, British Guiana, 521, Sligo to Glenelg, 9 July 1836, no. 528, Enclosure no. 15; Patrick Dunn to Sligo, 29 June 1836, p. 65.

From Table 2, it is possible to get a sense of the type of apprentices most likely to be manumitted. For Barbados, there were considerably more women than men and more nonpraedials than praedials. Neither of these figures is surprising, especially considering the preponderance of females as domestics among the apprenticed population. The total number of manumitted apprentices for 1837, almost 1200, was significant. There is also some evidence that parents were purchasing the freedom of their children, so they could be educated or trained for skilled work.⁵⁶ There was an additional motivation for planters to manumit apprentices: some former masters freed apprentices who would be more likely to remain on their plantations after emancipation. In a letter to Sligo in May 1838, Lord Holland, whose wife owned estates in Jamaica, reported that he was manumitting several apprentices each month. His intention was to reward the “sober and industrious and well behaved labourers” on the estates in the hope that they would become resident freedmen and work for wages once Apprenticeship had ended.⁵⁷

The data also suggest that the number of apprentices gaining their manumission was increasing rather than decreasing as the end of Apprenticeship was approaching, at least for the nonpraedial population. In the case of St. Vincent in 1837, two stipendiary magistrates reported a strong desire on the part of the apprentices to purchase their manumission. In the following year in Barbados, there was a rush to manumission, despite the relative closeness to the end of the Apprenticeship system.⁵⁸ One of the stipendiary magistrates for the town of Bridgetown, Henry Loving, reported in February that the nonpraedials

are every day becoming more anxious for their Discharge, and that some who cannot obtain it by the usual means, exhibit such restiveness and bad conduct, as to oblige their Proprietors to dispense with the remaining term of Service rather than be tormented by such disaffected persons.⁵⁹

A month later, Loving reported that the “intense longing for unequivocal freedom is the only motive by which the slave of 1833 is guided at this moment.”⁶⁰

56 *PP*, 1838, Part 5, Jamaica, 154–1, Lionel Smith to Glenelg, 8 September 1837, no. 65, Enclosure no. 26: Special Magistrate’s Report—Jas. Kennet Dawson, 10 July 1837, p. 295.

57 *NLJ*, Sligo Papers, Letters to Sligo, Ms 275, Holland to Sligo, 13 May 1838.

58 *TNA*, CO 260/56, Report of Polson, Stipendiary Magistrate, Second District, February, 1838; Report of John Colthurst, Stipendiary Magistrate, 5th District, 31 March 1838.

59 *TNA*, CO 28/122, MacGregor to Glenelg, 20 March 1838, no. 60, enclosure: Report of Henry Loving, Stipendiary Magistrate—Town District A—For February.

60 *TNA*, CO 28/122, MacGregor to Glenelg, 20 March 1838, no. 60, enclosure: Report of Henry Loving, Stipendiary Magistrate—Town District A—For February.

In his district, the number of appraisements had gone up each month, so much so that by the early spring and before the Barbados Legislature had passed the legislation ending the Apprenticeship for all apprentices in 1838, masters were voluntarily freeing their apprentices. This pattern continued even after the Barbados Assembly passed the legislation ending Apprenticeship in May. There were so many apprentices gaining their freedom in the spring and summer of 1838 that Loving predicted that all apprentices would gain their freedom before the legislation took effect on August 1st. The statistics supported this view: the governor, Sir E.J.M. MacGregor, reported that more than 30,000 apprentices had been manumitted voluntarily by their owners in June.⁶¹

Before this rush of voluntary manumission, there was a very revealing report from St. Vincent in early 1838 that the nonpraedials were anxious to be manumitted, even at that late date, because they wanted to purchase their own manumission and not be “indebted to the Law.” This was even more the case once the legislation ending the Apprenticeship had been enacted. One stipendiary magistrate in St. Vincent reported that some apprentices clearly did not want to become manumitted by the general legislation; they did not want to be, as they called it, “a Queen Adelaide’s Man’, that is free by the operation of the Law or as they say ‘that Buckra may change his mind again and make the Apprenticeship longer.’”⁶² Another stipendiary magistrate in the island, John Anderson, warned apprentices not to purchase their manumission at that late date; in his view, full freedom was only a few months away and apprentices should instead save their money in case they ran into difficulties. However, the response of these apprentices was unambiguous: “they no go be fuss of August nigger” (McDonald 2001:203).

In St. Vincent and elsewhere, apprentices had very clear ideas about freeing themselves. In the period after emancipation in 1838, when there was a concern about re-enslavement, there was also a fear among apprentices that the Whites could lengthen the period of Apprenticeship. This was also the case in Cuba, where, as Rebecca Scott notes, apprentices (*patronicados*) similarly bought their freedom, even when the Apprenticeship system in Cuba was coming to an end. Like the apprentices in St. Vincent, *patronicados* wanted to “claim for themselves responsibility for their own freedom” (R. Scott 2000 [1985]:155).

61 TNA, CO 28/122, MacGregor to Glenelg, 12 June 1838, no. 140, Enclosure: Report of Henry Loving, Stipendiary Magistrate—Town District A—for May; TNA, CO 28/122, MacGregor to Glenelg, 5 July 1838, no. 163.

62 TNA, CO 260/57, Report of Polson, Stipendiary Magistrate, May 1838, Second District. Queen Adelaide was the widow of King William IV, who died in 1837.

In addition, many praedial apprentices were bitter about their unchanged legal status after August 1, 1838. In their view, they were “the most useful and important class” of apprentices and could not therefore understand why they should serve an additional two years of Apprenticeship (Marshall 1977:200). Moreover, according to *The British Emancipator*, praedials had never recognized the distinction between themselves and nonpraedials in the Abolition Act.

The newspaper reported a conversation between a praedial apprentice and a White man in Jamaica during which the apprentice complained about his extra two years of Apprenticeship: “No massa! No tell me about two years serve, because you buckra no want we for free, but no mind, time will come.” The apprentice then threatened that “if all no free the same day the king order, the whole country will rise, and we will see what buckra and the mulatto can do with us, for we too much for them.” Although *The British Emancipator* concluded that the report was exaggerated, it nonetheless suggested that the praedials would adopt a system of passive resistance and refuse to work any longer as apprentices after August 1. In a further report, *The British Emancipator* suggested that there would be “a general strike of work” on the first of August and that the praedials would join the nonpraedials “and will steadfastly refuse to be a moment longer kept in bondage.”⁶³ A stipendiary magistrate in Jamaica, S. Pryce, was also very worried about the continuation of Apprenticeship after 1838. Pryce believed that it would be an “appalling evil” and, far more worrying, envisaged “a war of extermination” if praedials were not freed at the same time as nonpraedials. John Colthurst also believed that the consequences of delaying Apprenticeship for the praedials were very serious. He concluded that “if full manumission is not conceded on the first of August next, I would give little for West India property.”⁶⁴

Apprenticeship did come to an end for all apprentices in 1838. Yet even before it ended, there were reports of improvements in the apprenticed population. As in the case of Suriname during the Apprenticeship period, there were more marriages among the apprentices, and more of them were being educated. Less than a year after the beginning of Apprenticeship, a stipendiary magistrate in Jamaica noted that apprentices “have learnt more English during the last year than in the 10 preceding.”⁶⁵ Some who chose not to be

63 *The British Emancipator*, 11 April 1838, no. 11; 2 April 1838.

64 TNA, CO 137/222, Smith to Glenelg, 21 February 1838, no. 28: Report of S. Pryce, 30 September 1837; Marshall 1977:154.

65 Emmer 1993:99; *PP*, 1833–1835, Part 2, 278–1, Sligo to Glenelg, 7 July 1835, no. 142, Enclosure no. 49: Report of J. Daughtrey, 30 June 1835, p. 264.

manumitted were saving money to buy land immediately after emancipation. Stipendiary magistrates reported on the general improvement in the social condition of apprentices and one magistrate contrasted the difference between the enslaved and the apprentices: “[the apprentice] does not now consider himself that degraded being he did in the time of slavery, and is wonderfully improved in appearance and health.”⁶⁶ Another magistrate in St. Vincent made a similar point and suggested that the money apprentices earned “had given to them a feeling of importance which they never before experienced, and has engendered a degree of pride, which tends much to make them already sensible that they are elevated above the mere creatures of labour.”⁶⁷

4 Conclusion

In the face of a highly oppressive system, apprentices initially resisted Apprenticeship and, like apprentices in Cuba 50 years later, subsequently sought to use it to their own advantage (R. Scott 2000 [1985]:139). Apprentices saw positive changes in their lives: a significant number were manumitted, and others had their classification changed to ensure their early freedom. The power of corporal punishment was removed from their enslavers, and apprentices were able to bring their former masters before the stipendiary magistrates’ courts. In those courts, apprentices could be treated harshly, but they also found protection in ways that were very different from their experiences during slavery. For example, the manager of an estate in St. Kitts complained that his apprentice Margaret refused to dig holes for potatoes. But Margaret claimed before stipendiary magistrate Cleghorn that she was unable to do this work and produced a medical certificate confirming that she was exempt from “holing.” As a result, the manager withdrew the complaint. In another case in St. Kitts, an apprentice named Priscilla complained that the manager of an estate had killed her sheep during martial law on the island. After a witness confirmed that this had happened, Cleghorn ordered the manager to pay Priscilla for the sheep. Cleghorn also ruled that Prince, an apprentice who normally worked as a “doctor” on an estate in St. Kitts, should not be forced to work as a field laborer. Prince maintained that he had never worked in the field, and an auxiliary con-

66 *PP*, 1838, Part 5, Jamaica, 154–1, Lionel Smith to Glenelg, 8 September 1837, no. 65, Enclosure no. 38; Edward Dacres Baynes to Capt. S.R. Warren, 1 July 1837, p. 304; Enclosure no. 26, (quote).

67 *TNA*, CO 260/55, MacGregor to Glenelg, 5 April 1837, no. 70: Report from Pitman, SM, 21 November 1836, Windward District.

stable on the estate corroborated Prince's story. For Cleghorn, Prince's role as a sick nurse was his "natural avocation" and countermanded the estate manager's attempt to effectively demote him.⁶⁸ In addition, governors sometimes intervened to protect apprentices: for example, when a purchaser of an estate in Jamaica sought to transfer the apprentices elsewhere, Sligo insisted that this would be against the law if it was "injurious to the health and welfare" of the apprentices.⁶⁹

Apprenticeship also allowed apprentices to respond to demands they believed were inappropriate. An overseer on an estate in St. Kitts complained that only 27 of the cutting gang had turned when it should have been 35 and asked the driver to select apprentices who could work an individual row. When the driver ordered several apprentices to do this, "they refused and threw down their hoes, clapped their hands, and made a great noise declaring they would not carry a row." One of the apprentices, Jenny, claimed that her former master had never given her a row to do by herself; another apprentice, Esther, said that she was working with a borrowed hoe and, as a result, would continue to work in a row with another person. A third apprentice, Glasgow, made it clear that he would only work a row by himself if every other apprentice had to do so as well. These apprentices had an understanding of what they believed were excessive demands and refused to accede to them. But there was a price to pay: Cleghorn ordered the apprentices to work for seven and a half hours for the estate on their own time the following Saturday. Because of the Apprenticeship system, however, apprentices could articulate their grievances in ways that were generally not possible during slavery and that would have resulted in far more severe punishments.⁷⁰

There was also a further advantage for apprentices: as John Anderson noted in his journal, apprentices were able to use control over their free time for the things that mattered to them such as family, community, religion, and recreation (McDonald 2001:30). A stipendiary magistrate in Jamaica concluded that Apprenticeship was not what apprentices expected or wanted but "it is at least a protective one to him, and that by good behaviour he has the power of securing himself from the aggression of the tyrannical or the persecution of the vindictive."⁷¹ As apprentices in Barbados told Colthurst, they were much better

68 SKNNA, B7/21, Ralph Cleghorn: James Barnes v Margaret, 9 October 1835; Priscilla v Barnes, 14 April 1835; Prince v Deane, 7 March 1835.

69 NLJ, Sligo Papers, MS 228, Letter Books of Peter Browne, p. 38, no. 2805, 5 May.

70 SKNNA, B7/21, Ralph Cleghorn: Richard Selford v Esther et al., 13 October 1835.

71 *PP*, 1833–1835, Part 2, 278–1, Sligo to Glenelg, 7 July 1835, no. 142, Enclosure, no. 2: Report of Edmund B. Lyon, 1 July 1835, p. 242.

off than under slavery and denied abolitionists' claims that Apprenticeship had made their condition even worse. According to Colthurst, apprentices repeatedly told him:

Massa can't lick us now, massa major, till you say do word, nor massa can't make us work when he like, nor he can't beat the women, nor he can't see us when he like, nor he can't put us in the dungeon, nor he can't do nothing at all to us dat bad—for you punish him if he do; he must now give us the yam and the corn, because the law make him, and de house and de cloth, and everything. Massa can't do nothing to us till he bring us to you.

MARSHALL 1977:31

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