

Manumission in Late Eighteenth-Century Jamaica

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Abstract

Manumission touched comparatively few slaves, but it proved to be an essential institution for the growth of Jamaica's free population-of-color. Heretofore, there have been no systematic studies of manumission records for the eighteenth century. This paper analyzes manumission deeds filed as official records in the island's Secretary's office during the 1770s. These documents are scrutinized in light of Edward Long's 1774 discussion on the free population and the manumission process. Despite white anxiety over the growth of the free-population-of-color, the data show that a wide cross-section of Jamaica's free-population liberated enslaved people for a variety of reasons, including cash payments that reflected market imperatives. While most enslaved people could never hope to find freedom in this fashion, the constancy of manumission had an enormous bearing on the makeup of the free population.

Keywords

manumission – manumitted – miscegenation – Jamaica – Edward Long – free-population-of-color – slavery

In the quarter century before the American Revolution, Jamaica's economy boomed, thanks to long-distance credit networks, a secular increase in sugar demand, a steady supply of enslaved Africans, and an intensification of a particularly brutal system of plantation management.¹ However, Trevor Burnard

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and John Garrigus explain that the near success of Tacky's Rebellion reminded white colonists that they held a tenuous grip over the enslaved population. Following this near-overthrow of the planter class in 1760, the island Assembly ceded to masters greater authority over their slaves while implementing legislation designed to harden the connection between race and slavery. It was within the context of this flourishing Hobbesian economy that both the law and social mores conspired against free people of color through the imposition of a number of civil restraints. Freedmen and freedwomen, no matter what their wealth, were increasingly cornered into a liminal social space, fixed in statute between slave and free. The rising segregationist tide of the 1760s and 1770s—which was part and parcel of the wider effort to reassert planter hegemony—simultaneously promoted the lowliest Whites while socially humiliating free people of color (Burnard & Garrigus 2016). This hyper-racialization of Jamaican society strengthened white solidarity across class lines and maximized the gulf between Whites and the masses of enslaved people who built Britain's most prosperous American colony.

Despite the intensifying hostility directed toward free Blacks and free people of color during the 1760s and 1770s, a small number of Whites from nearly all social strata continued to manumit (voluntarily free) individual slaves. Titled grandees, merchants, plantation attorneys, white tradesmen, spinsters, and widows persisted in liberating select slaves for a variety of economic and personal reasons, including (1) paternalistic generosity; (2) the reward for loyalty and hard work; (3) "love and affection" for sons, daughters, liaisons, and other family members; and/or (4) financial compensation for the loss of the manumitted person's labor. Further, the island government continued to consider manumission an important tool for controlling slaves by offering freedom to those who revealed conspiracies or defended the colony from external enemies.²

Neither contemporaries nor modern historians have written much about manumission in Jamaica or the early establishment of the island's free population of color. The sole eighteenth-century discussion of the causes and con-

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2 For example, "An Act to Make Free Several Negro and Mulatto Slaves, as a Reward for Their Faithful Services in the Late Rebellions" (1 Geo. 3 c. 23); "An Act to Make Free a Negro Slave Named Jack, the Property of Peter Thomas, of the Parish of St Mary, Planter, for His Faithful Services to the Public" (2 Geo. 3 c. 12). All statute references were obtained from *The Laws of Jamaica*.

sequences of manumission appears in Edward Long's *History of Jamaica* (1774). Other than this commentary, the only primary sources from the period are statutes, private acts, and the manumission deeds themselves. These freedom contracts are presently bound and housed in the Jamaica Archives and can be viewed in a digital format thanks to the British Library's Endangered Archives Programme (*Manumission Liber* 1772–1774).³ This present study pairs Long's discussion with an analysis of a database of 318 manumission deeds that were contemporaneously entered into Volume 11 (1772–1774) of the colony's manumission deed books. These particular records document the liberation of 460 people, nearly all of whom were freed during the 1770s.⁴ With these quantitative and qualitative records, the following analysis provides new insight into the demographic and social profile of manumitters and manumitted while exploring the complex relationships that led some masters to free select slaves.

A Controversial Practice in Late-Eighteenth-Century Jamaica

There was little social or religious encouragement of manumission in the Anglophone Caribbean. Britain's slave empire emerged in the seventeenth century unimpeded by legal and social mores that might have checked the master's power. Thus, unlike ancient Rome or colonial Latin America where manumission was supported, if not encouraged (at least on paper),⁵ there was no institutional or cultural tradition pushing British masters to recognize the humanity

3 Originals housed in the Jamaica Archives, 1B/11/6. Note that number references to *Manumission Liber* indicate digital image number.

4 The hardcopies, which are handwritten facsimiles produced in the late nineteenth century, are found in the Jamaica Archives. The earliest manumission deed in the dataset was executed in 1750. However, 98 percent of the manumitted people in the database were freed between 1770 and 1774, inclusive.

5 There are no statistical data from ancient Rome to measure manumission rates, but the consensus is that manumission was prominent in Roman slavery as compared to that of ancient Greece. Like early modern America, Roman manumission was likely an urban phenomenon and one that incorporated self-purchase (duBois 2009:101–2). While slavery was largely an abusive system and manumission was used as a tool for social control, Roman masters nonetheless “attracted the esteem of their peers through acts of kindness,” such as manumission (Bradley 1987:81, 83, 112). In a classic but overly Panglossian view of Brazilian slavery, Frank Tannenbaum linked the manumission provisions found in the Justinian legal code of late-Roman antiquity to Iberian and Latin American acceptance and encouragement of bequeathing freedom to slaves (Tannenbaum 1992). Historians have recently re-asserted “the centrality of the law” and have shown how slaves, themselves, endeavored to use the Latin American legal codes to assert their rights, including that of self-purchase (*coartación*). See de la Fuente 2010:164.

of the enslaved. Instead, the white community collectively constructed slaves as inanimate labor inputs; British-held slaves were largely locked into a “closed” labor system that classified them as mere chattel, to be held in perpetuity. Yet, despite the social death endured by Africans and their children, individual masters sometimes upset the slave order by freeing a handful of slaves. Individual manumission may not have threatened the demographic integrity of Jamaica’s slave system, but the private liberation of individual slaves proved to be another contradiction to the legal fiction that defined people as property.

Jamaica, as with the rest of the British colonies, treated manumission as a property transfer, with formal deeds drafted, witnessed, signed, and kept by the island government that safeguarded the former slave’s property right over his or her own body. These documents are typically straightforward and tend to describe the process as an intimate and local affair, usually involving a tight-knit circle of actors from the same parish, which included the manumitter(s), manumittee(s), and witnesses. Sometimes, however, the deeds identify a long chain of participants that included absentee manumitters in Britain, London-based creditors, local attorneys, plantation overseers, and manumittees.

Once a deed was fully executed, the manumitted held a second- or even third-class position in Jamaica. According to Edward Long, freed “Blacks and Mulattoes” were considered by Whites to be untrustworthy and a particularly problematic class of people; they were viewed with intense suspicion and were presumed by Whites to be a collection of thieves and vagabonds. Consequently, the sons and daughters of slaves were forever deemed incompetent to offer testimony in any court case involving a freeborn person, no matter what the plaintiff’s or defendant’s skin color. Further, formerly enslaved people “were allowed no other mode of trial, than that” used against “common slaves” (Long 1774, vol. 2:320).⁶ Freeborn men and women of color were considered of better character—and therefore afforded the right to a jury trial and were allowed to give evidence in cases against other free people of color and in civil suits lodged against Whites—but they, too, were denied full legal equality and, therefore, left vulnerable to abuse.

Jamaican law offered little protection to manumittees, but the Assembly sometimes put forth special private acts that gave limited rights to select free persons of color.⁷ These additional civil protections were given very sparingly

6 As recounted in “An Act to Prevent Slaves ... from Availing Themselves ... of Manumissions Granted Them after The Commission of the Crime ... for Which They Stand So Charged” (25 Geo. 3 c. 8). “Negroes born slaves and afterwards manumitted” were “tried by two justices of the peace and three freeholders.”

7 In the eighteenth century, 124 free people of color secured “limited ‘privileges’” and four

to “inheritors of large estates in the island” (Long 1774, vol. 2:320) such as the Clarendon parish mulatto planter, John Donaldson⁸ or to those who had proven themselves an asset to the white elite. For example, in 1772, the Assembly bestowed upon the mulatto inventor and engineer, Dugald Clarke, “the same rights and privileges” as an “English subject, under certain restrictions.”⁹ Because of this act, Clarke’s African ancestry disappeared on paper, as documented in a 1772 manumission deed that recounts his participation in freeing a mulatto woman, Nancy Crean, and her two children. This particular deed identifies Clarke’s profession, home parish, and his role as the source of the £170 paid to the absentee Dominick Duany, but nowhere does the record describe his skin color. Rather, the indenture reads as a financial bargain between social equals (*Manumission Liber* 1772–1774:408). Yet, despite the suggestion of equality, even a talented, freeborn mulatto like Clarke was barred from juries and public office, including that of the Council, the Assembly, and the courts (Long 1774, vol. 2:320).

Long explained that Jamaica’s free population of color grew due to the “boon” manumission bestowed upon select slaves. He claimed that “the slaves” who were “most commonly” manumitted were (1) “domesticks, in reward for a long and faithful service”; (2) those who managed to purchase their freedom by paying their masters from their own “earnings”; and (3) those “who have effected some essential service” to the colony, “such as revealing a conspiracy, or fighting valiantly against rebel” slaves “and invaders” (Long 1774, vol. 2:322),¹⁰ such as when the “negro woman slave named Attea” revealed a

received all the rights of Whites, including office-holding rights, through legislative act. See Hurwitz & Hurwitz 1967:424 and Livesay 2018:15–18, 42–101.

8 7 Geo. 3 Private Act. Note that in 1775, Frances, William, and John Jones, free “mustees” and owners of “both land and slaves of considerable value,” were granted “the same rights and privileges with English subjects, under certain restrictions” (16 Geo. 3 Private Acts; Jamaica Acts 1774–1775, UK National Archives, CO 139/31).

9 12 Geo. 3 Private Acts. Dugald Clarke resided in St Thomas in the East. Patent drawings of his 1769 design for a steam-driven mill can be found in Higman (2001:150). Higman notes that Clarke died in Kingston’s debtor’s prison. See also Brathwaite 1971:172–73.

10 Some 46 slaves were manumitted by statute in the period between 1737 and 1774, the year in which Long’s book was published. Of these 46 people, 24 were freed in the 14 years following Tacky’s Rebellion. In the immediate aftermath of this uprising, eighteen slaves who were owned by some of the island’s most prominent planters were freed by the island government and given an annuity of £5 per year. The manumittedes included “Foster, Pembroke, and George, three Negro men slaves belonging to the honourable Charles Price, esquire; Cuffey, belonging to John Ayscough, esquire; Billy, a mulatto, belonging to Thomas Nicholas Swigle, esquire; Blackwall, belonging to his honour Henry Moore, esquire, the

Westmoreland conspiracy involving over 1,500 slaves (15 Geo. 3 c. 9). Unfortunately, Long failed to discuss any of these paths to freedom in any detail and, instead, trained a great deal of attention on his own fear and frustration regarding those of mixed ancestry who were freed by the grace or efforts of their white fathers.

Miscegenation likely gnawed at Long for a number of reasons, but what bothered him most was how sexual access to women of color stymied the development of stable white families. Long, like many elites, held out hope for the establishment of white yeoman families and the creation of a tropical England in Jamaica. He cringed at the fact that “many” white “men, of every rank, quality, and degree” preferred to “riot ... in goatish embraces” with slave women rather than “share the pure and lawful bliss derived from matrimonial, mutual love” with white women. Any local critic of “simple fornication” with women of color, Long wrote, would be labeled “a simple blockhead; since not one in twenty” white men “can be persuaded that there is either sin; or shame in cohabiting with his slave” (Long 1774, vol. 2:328).¹¹ To be sure, it was not the sin of extramarital sex that vexed Long, but rather it was the potential social instability engendered by the natural attachment fathers felt for their “spurious” children.¹² Jamaica’s white colonists might have collectively supported the rigid, color-coded social hierarchy in the abstract, but some men nonetheless

lieutenant-governor; Yankey, Billy, and Philip, belonging to William Beckford, esquire; London, belonging to the estate of John Gleve; Moll, and her son named Quaco, belonging to Peter Brown Kelly, esquire; Nero, Congo Molly, and Beckford, belonging to Arthur Forrest, Esquire; Silver, belonging to George Goodwin, esquire; Jemmy, belonging to the estate of John Smith, in the parish of Westmoreland, deceased; and Will, belonging to William Gordon, of the parish of Kingston, esquire.” The wording of the law indicates that these former slaves were “instrumental in discovering the said conspiracies, and active in suppressing the said rebellions” (1 Geo. 3 c. 23).

- 11 It should be noted that later abolitionists cited mixed-race children as evidence of the degeneracy of the slave system. James Ramsay, abolitionist and one-time resident of St Kitts, claimed that planters considered white families too expensive and “determined it to be better to employ a dissipated, careless, and unfeeling young man, or a groveling, lascivious, old bachelor (each with his half score of black or mulattoe pilfering harlots)” (Ramsay 1784:83–84). Richard Pares casts doubt on the prevalence of this management strategy (Pares 1968:354). I, too, have never seen an example of a Jamaican planter proactively discouraging the matrimony of their white workers.
- 12 On the influence of social anxiety on Long’s unique construction of race, see Suman 2014:764–72. On Long’s condemnation of interracial sex and the white demographic failure on the island, see Paugh 2017:75–76. A slightly different rendering of Long’s condemnation of interracial cohabitation and sexual relations is to consider it as an attack on the “effeminacy” of white men who found themselves unable to resist the temptation of black and mulatto women (Burnard 2006:189).

felt the impulse and possessed the means to socially elevate their own children as much as the legal code permitted.

Long complained that many fathers of mixed-race children failed to internalize the collective social cost caused by their love and affection for their sons and daughters. Rather than placing their offspring in the “mechanic art[s]” or as domestics—as was usually done with mulatto slaves on sugar estates (Dunn 2014:174; Higman 1995:189, 200)—the tendency was for these free children to be sent to “England, for schooling” (Long 1774, vol. 2:328–29). He claimed that these young people who attended Westminster, Eton, or similar elite schools found themselves psychologically adrift and socially alienated, once returning to Jamaica. Their formal education, Long wrote, “only ... makes” them “more susceptible of keen reflections, arising from” their “unfortunate birth.” Long, however, was not simply expressing concern for the emotional well-being of free people of color. Rather, his remarks should be seen as part of his overarching racist argument that dismissed the intellectual capacity and achievement of black and mixed-race people, such as the celebrated Lincoln Inn-trained Jamaican freedman, Francis Williams (Carretta 2003:213–37). English schools served to “police the borders of the privileged class” (Williamson 2010:77–78), which Long considered the exclusive home of Whites. It is no surprise, then, that he would condemn the sending forth of mixed-race students to these schools and would heap praise on the Assembly’s 1761 effort to curb the generosity of wealthy fathers through the imposition of a “legacy limit” of £2,000 upon nonwhite beneficiaries (Long 1774, vol. 2:323, 326, 329; 2 Geo. 3 c. 8; Hurwitz & Hurwitz 1967:429).¹³

Wealthy people of color posed an ideological and symbolic threat to white hegemony, but destitute free mulattos and Blacks also frightened Jamaica’s elites. Poverty concentrated among those with mixed ancestry, so Long called for “some regulation” of manumission in order to halt the spread of antisocial behavior on the streets of Kingston, Spanish Town, and outlying towns and hamlets. Whites considered the recently liberated as ill-prepared for life in freedom and, as a consequence, it was commonplace for them to blame former slaves for “thefts and other illegal practices,” for their own “maintenance.” Long recommended that the Assembly take action and compel manumitters to provide their manumitted with “some further grant, enabling” the manumit-

13 Christer Petley traces the rising tide of legislation restricting the rights of free people of color and recalls that the 1761 restriction on inheritances essentially shut out people of color from the sugar economy (Petley 2009:71). Also, see Heuman 1981:6. The restriction on bequests was removed in 1813 (Petley 2009:487). For a rich analysis of individuals sent from Jamaica to Britain for education, see Livesay 2018.

tee “to enjoy his new station with advantage to himself and to the community.” Under his plan, manumitters would be required to provide former plantation slaves with five to ten acres of land, while those manumitted who had neither a trade nor farming skills would be forced to “enrol themselves in some white family, as domesticks” (Long 1774, vol. 2:323). This commentary engaged a wider discussion that was taking place on the island that ultimately led the Assembly to pass “An Act for The Regulating the Manumission of ... Slaves” at the very end of 1774, the very same year as the publication of Long’s book. But unlike Long’s complicated suggestion for managing the manumitted, the Assembly simply opted to require manumitters to pay sufficient security to the parish church warden in order to distribute to each future manumittee a £5 annuity (15 Geo. 3 c. 18).

Process and Patterns of Manumission

Prior to the December 1774 legislation requiring manumitters to make financial provision for their former slaves, there was no government regulation of the manumission process. Masters who intended to free a slave during their lifetime would draw up “an instrument” of liberation “sealed and delivered” before a witness or two. The manumission deed would then be “registered either in the” parish “toll-book”—which was a local slave-sale ledger—“or the secretary’s office” on the ground floor of the Assembly building in Spanish Town (Long 1774, vol. 2:320, 9; Robertson 2005:106).¹⁴ This office was the safest location for the paperwork that ultimately guaranteed the freedom of manumitteds and, in the case of female manumitteds, their future children. Presently, thousands of manumission deeds are still housed in Spanish Town, bound in 63 volumes shelved in the Jamaica Archives. This nearly complete set of manumission records is more or less chronologically organized, spanning the 1740s through the apprenticeship period in the 1830s.

The individual deeds are always written in the first-person voice of the slaveholder(s). These documents typically begin by noting the manumitter’s occupation, social status, and/or phenotype as well as parish of residence and the name, crude age (woman, man, infant, boy, or girl), and phenotype of the manumittee. Immediately following these introductory remarks, the manumission deeds convey the rationale for bestowing the grant-of-freedom. Sometimes

14 On the definition of the toll book, see “An Act for Transcribing the Toll-Book of the Parish of Westmoreland” (21 Geo. 3 c. 18).

these passages attest to the manumittee's loyalty or productivity, such as when the planter William Vick Sr. agreed to free the "mulatto man" named Thomas West for "good and faithful services" (*Manumission Liber* 1772–1774:119). Other records simply indicate freedom in exchange for payment (in Jamaican currency). None of the records, however, describe a manumitter's wavering commitment to the institution of slavery.¹⁵ As suggested in Edward Long's lengthy critique of Jamaican society, a number of white fathers desired to free their own children, but only a handful of deeds contain frank statements identifying the paternal relationship between manumitter and slave. Sometimes, however, a deed divulges the complex family connections between the parties involved, such as when the white "spinster" Ruth Bartibo freed her mulatto grandson, Peter, because of her "love, favor, and affection" for *her* son, the boy's father, William Bartibo (*Manumission Liber* 1772–1774:412). Once offering a short explanation for bestowing freedom upon the slave or group of slaves, the manumission records usually conclude with the declaration that the manumittee is to be forever set free "from all manner of Slavery and Bondage whatsoever" (*Manumission Liber* 1772–1774:22) and that neither the manumitter nor his/her descendants have any claim on the former slave and, in the case of women, her future descendants.¹⁶

Over 80 percent of the manumission records indicate an exchange of money, but the majority of these records identify a symbolic token payment of only 10s. per person. Approximately 30 percent of the deeds enumerate bona fide payments. Nearly all records involving payment, no matter how small, identify a third-party figure, whose connection to the manumitter or manumittee is unsaid, but who seems to have served as a sponsor to the manumittee. It is this third party who delivered the funds into "the hand of" the manumitter. Immediately following the statement of freedom is a second declaration that simply acknowledged receipt of the money. The final step was for one of the witnesses to present and sign a "memorandum" before a public official (or a member of Jamaica's elite) in order to attest to the legitimacy of the manumission deed. For example, immediately after John Hitchman of Kingston bequeathed freedom upon the "Negro woman ... now lately baptized ... Mary" Lodge, the witness, John Somersett, swore before the King's Council member, Edward Foord, that he "Did see ... Hutchinson Sign Seal and as his Act and Deed Execute and Deliver the foregoing Instrument" (*Manumission Liber* 1772–

15 Contrast the absence of antislavery motivation with the "equalitarian ideals [that] motivated most manumitters in the [United States during the] years following the Revolution" (Berlin 1992:30).

16 It was the mother's status that determined whether a newborn was free or enslaved.

1774:29).¹⁷ Once this formality was completed, the deed, the payment receipt, and the witness's memorandum were delivered to Spanish Town to the island's Secretary's office. Sometimes it could take months or even years for this final but important step to be completed. In the case of Mary Lodge's manumission papers, five months passed between the memorandum's execution and the final entry in the island's manumission deed book.

While the documents are lengthy and repetitive, the terms of freedom are ultimately straightforward and definitive compared to some manumission deeds found in other parts of the Atlantic basin. The Jamaica deeds pledge an immediate and absolute state of liberty through the common refrain that the former slave is now "manumized, Enfranchised, and Forever set free." In other words, one does not find the complex contracts either delaying full freedom until a specified time—as found in Maryland and New Orleans records (Cole 2005:1109; Condon 2011:343–44; Whitman 1995:333–70)—or the imposition of conditions that would govern the former slave's life in freedom, as found in Brazilian records (Schwartz 1974:632). The only exception to this pattern found in Volume 11 is the contract that rendered freedom to the "mulatto woman" named Ann Neal. Rather than liberating her on the date of the deed's execution, her owner, Jane Stone, constructed a deed that granted freedom to Neal only after her death (*Manumission Liber* 1772–1774:41). This unique case demonstrates how a deed might have served in place of or in support of a will (Handler & Pohlmann 1984:396). Typically, in cases of inheritance, the drafting of the manumission deeds took place after the master's death, as specified in a last will and testament, with the estate's executor drafting and signing the manumission deed on behalf of the decedent's estate.¹⁸ All told, there were 20 deeds, or 6.3 percent of the records, which were executed under the direction of a standard will. Perhaps "spinstress" Stone took the initiative to draft her manumission commitment because she neither possessed nor planned to have a will or, alternatively, Stone may have simply wanted to convey a promise to Neal: unlike a modifiable will, the deed represented a forever-fixed transaction.

The manumission dataset constructed from Volume 11 includes 317 separate records that were submitted to the Secretary's office between June 2, 1772 and November 19, 1774. The 460 people freed through these instruments were the last manumittedes liberated under a largely unregulated system. As illustrated in Figure 1, every parish registered manumissions. The only irregularity in the data

17 Foord's death notice identifies him as of Kingston and a member of the Council (*Gentleman's Magazine*, June 1777, p. 295).

18 In the database there are 20 manumission deeds (6.3 percent) that were executed after the death of the manumitter.

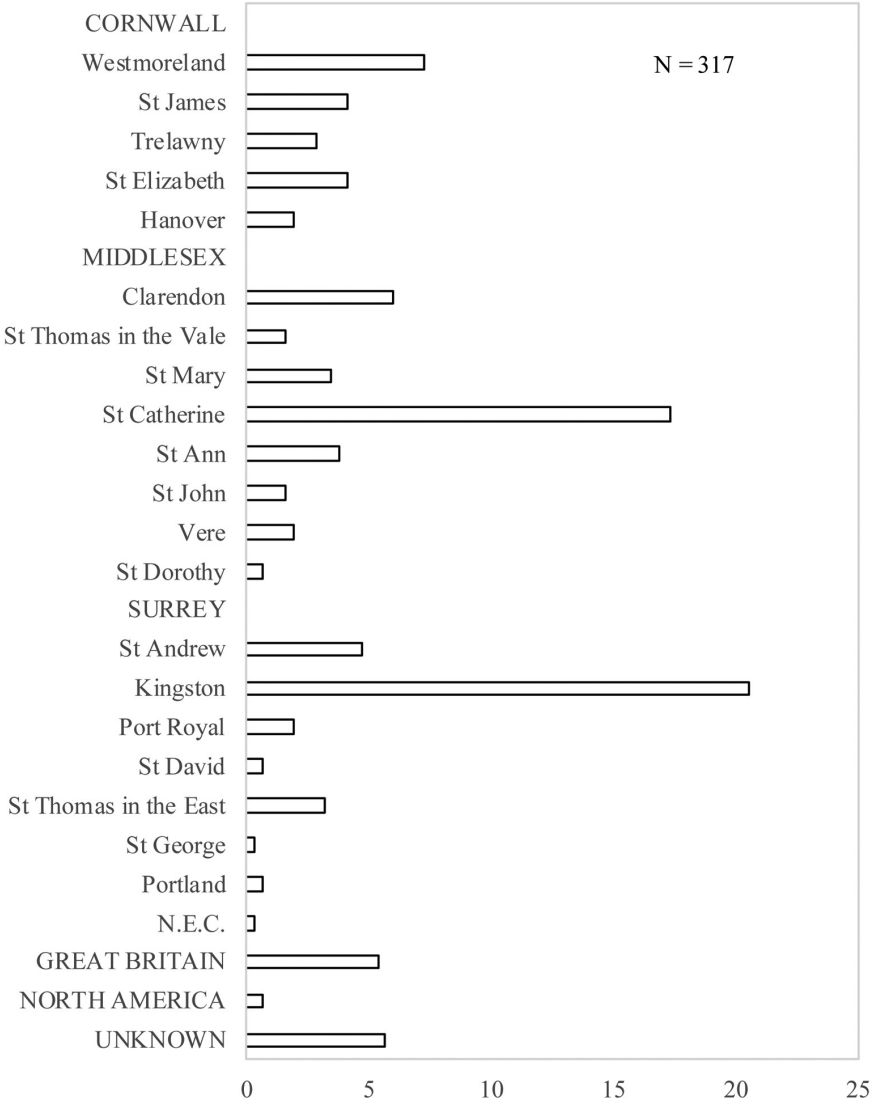


FIGURE 1 Percentage distribution of manumission deeds by manumitter residence
FIGURES CALCULATED FROM *MANUMISSION LIBER* 1172–1774

is the disproportionate share of Kingston and St Catherine deeds. These two parishes contained a small percentage of Jamaica's enslaved population (8 per-cent), yet they accounted for 40 percent of the manumissions in the dataset.¹⁹

19 Excluding Kingston and St Catherine parishes, there is a statistically significant positive

This concentration reflects a general manumission pattern seen in other parts of the Atlantic world: close physical proximity between slave and master as well as the availability of wage work provided the best opportunity for slaves to find their way to freedom.²⁰

The data indicate an annual manumission rate between 5.46 and 7.35 per thousand slaves in Kingston, while in St Catherine, the county in which the capital of Spanish Town is located, slaves were freed at an annualized rate between 3.35 and 4.52 per thousand. These figures are comparable to urban manumission rates in cities such as Buenos Aires (ca. 4 per thousand), São Salvador (ca. 10 per thousand), and Baltimore (ca. 9 per thousand).²¹ In aggregate, the estimated annual manumission rate for the entire island was approximately 0.73 per thousand.²² Perhaps it is unsurprising, given its density, that Port Royal had the third-highest rate of manumission, with an annualized figure between 2.33 and 3.14 per thousand. Rural parishes—most notably St George, Portland, St Dorothy, and St Thomas-in-the-Vale—had the lowest rates of manumission in Jamaica during the early 1770s.

Geography also had a bearing on the speed in which manumission documents were registered with the island Secretary. Jamaica's mountain roads were

correlation between the geographic distribution of the slave population and manumission deeds. Note that the population figures are from ca. 1768, which was two years before Trelawny parish was carved out of St James and St Ann. Thus the correlation between the percentage distribution of slaves by parish and the distribution of manumission records by parish excludes Trelawny parish, as well as Kingston and St Catherine. The correlation coefficient is 0.58 and is significant at the 5-percent level (2 tailed).

- 20 Jackson 1930:278–314; Mattoso 1991:147; Nishida 1993:361–91. Ronald Findlay provides a formalized economic model that deductively shows that supervision costs have a bearing on whether or not a slave has the opportunity to make an independent income. Trade work and urban labor favored these conditions (Findlay 1975:923–34). It is important to note that in Jamaica, plantation slaves were also afforded time and land to grow provisions for their own sustenance and income.
- 21 Johnson 1979:277; Schwartz 1974:606; Whitman 1995:337. Note that the Baltimore estimates are for the early nineteenth century, while the figures for Buenos Aires and Salvador, Bahia, are for the middle quartiles of the eighteenth century.
- 22 These annualized manumission rates are calculated by taking the annual average of the records dated between June 1772 and May 1774, inclusive. In Kingston, during this two-year period, 85 slaves were freed, while in St Catherine 66 were manumitted. The population figures for each parish in 1768 (compiled by Long) can be found in Greene (2016). These figures were adjusted upwards by a factor of 1.15, to account for the growth in population between 1768 and 1774 and by 1.16, as outlined by Ryden (2009:301). Across the island, 331 people were manumitted during the twenty-four-month period and the estimated total slave population was approximately 225,000 (1774). As a point of comparison, Smith recently noted a five per thousand manumission rate for St Vincent during the 1820s (Smith 2013:69).

notoriously bad, so connectivity to the seat of colonial power was not simply a matter of straight-line distance. As one might expect, however, the data indicate that manumitters in the home parishes surrounding Spanish Town²³ found submitting the paperwork to be comparatively easy. For the 265 manumissions deeds that identified the master's parish of residence, the median number of days between the declaration of freedom and the completion of the paperwork in the capital was 74. The same statistic, for the subset of 133 manumissions from one of the island's home parishes is just over one month (50 days) while that of the out-parishes is approximately four months (128 days). Yet, there was enormous variation in the data, with the longest span between manumission and the public filing of the deed being 23.5 years. In this case, the "Negro Boy slave named Esop," was freed by two executors, Edmund and Susannah Hyde, in September of 1750.²⁴ The two-decade delay in submitting Esop's paperwork might have had something to do with his youth, but if this was the reason, it was atypical: there is no detectable pattern in the dataset that would suggest that singly-manumitted children faced delays in the ultimate submission of their papers to the island's office of the Secretary.

While the manumission rate was very low in rural parishes, it is apparent that the freeing of slaves was not an unheard-of phenomenon throughout the island during the eighteenth century. Further, the deeds show that manumission touched a very diverse set of slaveholders (see Table 1). Among the subset of one hundred and six records that identify the manumitter's occupation, roughly 56 percent were signed by planters (nearly one-fifth of all deeds). Some very big men are among this subset of manumitters, such as Sir Charles Price Jr., a sugar grandee, speaker of the Jamaica Assembly, and owner of Worthy Park sugar plantation as well as the splendid retreat dubbed "the Decoy" and a massive Spanish Town home. Price inherited his father's entire estate in the summer of 1772,²⁵ making him one of the largest, but most indebted

23 St Catherine, St Thomas-in-the-Vale, St John, St Andrew, and Kingston.

24 Edmund Hyde was a diversified planter who owned 184 slaves, making him the ninth largest slaveholder in St Andrew Parish in 1753. He died on August 12, 1763 (Green 2016:85, 87, 93, 99, 239; *Gentleman's Magazine*, November 1763, p. 565).

25 At the time of Sir Charles Price Sr.'s death, in July 1772, the family had 12 plantations totaling 26,000 acres. Worthy Park is notable for being the longest-running estate in Jamaica (Craton 1978:18). For a thorough description of the "Decoy" retreat and additional biographical information, see Nelson 2016:136–39 and Long 1774, vol. 2:76. For a description of the looming Spanish Town residence on Monk Street—two blocks east of the island's secretary's office—see Robertson 2005:117. On Sir Charles Price Jr.'s inheritance and the death of his father after an illness that plagued Spanish Town in the summer of 1772, see "Joseph Lee to Robert Cooper Lee" June 16, 1772 and August 20, 1772, reprinted in Pow-

planters in Jamaica. This Jamaican scion and owner of 11 sugar estates continued his father's tradition of freeing select slaves in order to reward those who had shown notable loyalty, deference, and productivity (Craton 1978:222). In 1773 and in 1774, Sir Charles Jr. set free nine slaves in six separate manumission instruments: the beneficiaries—Anthony, Frankey, Fanny, John, Kate, Molly, Phoebe, Sally, and Titus²⁶—were each released gratis, with only a token amount of money being exchanged (10s. or less per person). While there is no indication that Sir Charles Jr. was related to the five “mulattos” in this group, their multiracial background and the accusations that his father spent his time “frequently” lying “with Black women” (Craton 2012:343) suggests the possibility he shared a biological connection with these formerly enslaved people.

Other planters in the database include proverbial absentees, who had the means and the desire to live in Great Britain and, in doing so, left the day-to-day management of their estates in the hands of “attorneys” and “overseers.” Jamaica attorneys were professional managers who held the power-of-attorney necessary to pay bills, settle contracts, and act as the absentee planter's representative on the island (Higman 2005:141). Manumission correspondence between absentee slave owners and the on-the-spot estate managers underscore the excruciating slowness of transatlantic communication. Typically, the overseer or attorney would serve as the intermediary who would request the freedom of an enslaved child on behalf of the “reputed” father, who was often-times a bookkeeper or tradesmen on the estate.²⁷ In July of 1796, for example, the Scottish absentee James Chisholme replied to this type of request (via his

ers 2012:163–65; 170–71. Price Jr.'s role as the speaker of the House is noted in 14 Geo. 4 c. 11. For more information on the Price dynasty, see Craton & Walvin 1970 and Handley 2004.

26 Anthony (*Manumission Liber* 1772–1774:388); Frankey (*Manumission Liber* 1772–1774:326); Fanny, John, Molly, and Sally (*Manumission Liber* 1772–1774:325); Kate (*Manumission Liber* 1772–1774:214); Phoebe (*Manumission Liber* 1772–1774:184); and Titus (*Manumission Liber* 1772–1774:212).

27 The phrase “reputed father” or “reputed son” is simply a legal phrase and not a reflection of the father's ambivalence toward his connection with his son or daughter. The legal definition for “reputed,” offered by the OED, is “generally believed, accounted, or reckoned (to be something specified).” For other contemporary examples, see 7 Geo. 3 Private Acts securing special rights to Frances, Cleopatra, Susanna, Ann, Mary, Elizabeth and John Freeman Ripley, “the reputed daughters [and son] of John Ripley, of the parish of St Andrew ... by Emma Freeman, a free Negro woman.” This particular private act also gave “William Gibson, the reputed son of James Gibson, of the parish of Kingston, pastry-cook, by ... Cleopatra ... the same rights and privileges with English Subjects, born of white parents, under certain restrictions.” “Reputed” appears in a number of manumission deeds. See *Manumission Liber* 1772–1774:306, 310, 359, 385.

TABLE 1 Distribution of manumission deeds by manumitter occupation

| Occupation | Count | Percent of all manumitters | Percent of identified occupations |
|---------------------------|-------|-------------------------------|---|
| Unknown Occupation | | | |
| Deceased | | | — |
| Deceased | 4 | 1.5 | |
| Deceased Free Mulatto Man | 1 | 0.4 | — |
| Deceased Widow | 3 | 1.1 | — |
| Free Persons of Color | | | |
| Free Person of Color | 1 | 0.4 | |
| Black/Negro Man | 3 | 1.1 | — |
| Mulatto Man | 2 | 0.8 | — |
| Black/Negro Woman | 5 | 1.9 | — |
| Mulatto Woman | 7 | 2.7 | — |
| Quadroon Woman | | 0.0 | — |
| White Men | | | |
| Esq | 35 | 13.3 | — |
| Gentleman | 15 | 5.7 | — |
| Unidentified | 59 | 22.3 | — |
| White Women | | | |
| Gentlewoman | 1 | 0.4 | — |
| Spinster/Miss | 17 | 6.4 | — |
| Widow/Relict | 22 | 8.3 | — |
| <hr/> | | | |
| Subtotal | 175 | 66% | — |
| <hr/> | | | |
| Tradesmen, Mariners, etc. | | | |
| Carpenter | | | |
| Carpenter | 1 | 0.4 | 1.1 |
| Free Mulatto Carpenter | 1 | 0.4 | 1.1 |
| House Carpenter | 3 | 1.1 | 3.4 |
| Fisherman | | | |
| Fisherman | 1 | 0.4 | 1.1 |
| Free Black Fisherman | 1 | 0.4 | 1.1 |
| Grazier | | | |
| Grazier | 1 | 0.4 | 1.1 |

TABLE 1 Distribution of manumission deeds by manumitter occupation (*cont.*)

| Occupation | Count | Percent of all manumitters | Percent of identified occupations |
|------------------------------------|-------|-------------------------------|---|
| Mariner | | | |
| Mariner | 1 | 0.4 | 1.1 |
| Deceased Mariner | 1 | 0.4 | 1.1 |
| Free Mulatto Mariner | 1 | 0.4 | 1.1 |
| Mason | 2 | 0.8 | 2.2 |
| Millwright | 2 | 0.8 | 2.2 |
| Sadler | 1 | 0.4 | 1.1 |
| Shopkeeper | 2 | 0.8 | 2.2 |
| Taylor | 1 | 0.3 | 1.1 |
| Subtotal | 19 | 7 % | 21 % |
| Merchants, Planters, Professionals | | | |
| Rector | 1 | 0.4 | 1.1 |
| Surgeon | 2 | 0.8 | 2.2 |
| Merchant | 13 | 4.9 | 14.6 |
| Planter | | 0.0 | |
| Planter | 49 | 18.6 | 55.1 |
| Baronet | 1 | 0.4 | 1.1 |
| Viscount | 1 | 0.4 | 1.1 |
| Governor | 1 | 0.4 | 1.1 |
| Naval Captain | 2 | 0.8 | 2.2 |
| Subtotal | 70 | 27 % | 79 % |
| Total | 264 | 100 % | 100 % |

FIGURES CALCULATED FROM *MANUMISSION LIBER 1772–1774*

Scotland-based merchant) by explaining that he had “no objection to manumise Mr Wheelers Child,” so long as Wheeler “put ... an able Negroe on the estate in” her “place” (Chisholme, July 19, 1796:37b).²⁸ Given the fact that voyages from England to Jamaica took approximately 62 days and the return trip was roughly 67 days (Higman 2005:128), Chisholme would not make mention of the bargain again before December 31, when he announced his resolution to dispatch to Jamaica the “manumission” deed “for the mulatto child Fanny, the daughter of Jeany’s Sarah” during the forthcoming New Year (Chisholme, December 31, 1796:44b–45). By April, the deed for “Wheelers Child” still had not been drafted, but Chisholme promised that he would follow through by the “first Bristol Ship in the end of the Year.” This pledge, however, was also broken, and it would not be until the following February that the “manumission for Fanny” would be finally sent to the colony (Chisholme, April 3, 1796:51). It took approximately two years for Wheeler to negotiate his daughter’s freedom.²⁹

Not all fathers pursued their children’s liberty with the same zeal shown by Wheeler. Some simply chose to ignore their progeny and did little or nothing for them: one late nineteenth-century visitor wrote that “families of mulattoes” are left upon the estates by successive white overseers and bookkeepers who consign their children “to slavery, with as much indifference as with his old shoes” (Anon. 1790:55–58; Dallas 1803:127). Others made half-hearted attempts to free their son or daughter, soliciting their child’s owner to bestow freedom, gratis, as a favor to a loyal employee. For example, Colleen A. Vasconcellos describes how two employees of the York sugar estate in Trelawny parish had neither the money nor the will to offer a replacement slave to their respective children’s owner. All the two could muster was a single appeal to the owner’s generosity, which was politely denied (Vasconcellos 2015:54–55). But even when white fathers offered fair market value, some masters and their estate managers thought it too risky to opt for a replacement worker. The infamous Simon Taylor, for example, refused to act promptly upon an offer of payment for manumission until the enslaved woman was well past her prime, some 12 years after the initial request for freedom (Cambell 2009:146). While it is impossible to know the exact proportion of fathers who recognized and worked to free their enslaved children, Higman’s study of slave returns on the eve of emancipation

28 All references to correspondence from James Chisholme in 1796 are from James Chisholme Letterbook, MS 4476, National Library of Scotland.

29 The delays found in transatlantic communication must have encouraged fathers of enslaved children to simply purchase their sons and daughters from their owners rather than request a manumission deed, such as when the overseer of Hope Estate offered to purchase his son from his employer, Anna Elletson Bridges, in May of 1779 (Sturtz 1999).

found that no more than 40 percent of children with white fathers were manumitted (Higman 1995:141). This figure is likely an upper-bound estimate for the entire slavery period.

The most notable absentee in the database to make a pledge of freedom is none other than Edward Long. Concurrent with his critique of manumission, Long liberated Moll, a “Sambo woman,” from his Chichester home in picturesque southeast England. Baptized as “Sarah Lewis,” Moll was set free in exchange for £60, delivered in the hand of Florence Donovan, the overseer of Long’s estate, Lucky Valley, situated in Clarendon parish (*Manumission Liber* 1772–1774:230–31; Higman 2001:85). The following year, Long and his wife, Mary Ballard Long, directed their on-the-spot attorney to draft a second manumission deed that secured the freedom of the “Negro woman Slave named Grace,” baptized “Mary Cyrus,” and the mulatto child named Charles. The deed, like many others, does not indicate a relationship between Grace (aka Mary) and Charles, but the fact that they appear on a single record suggests that they were mother and son. Further, the fact that the third party, who paid Long £80, was also named Charles suggests a paternal connection between the sponsor and child.³⁰

We learn from this second deed how Long, *as* absentee planter, contributed to one of his greatest disappointments, *as* a social critic. The failure of a demographically robust white settler society haunted Long and, as discussed above, he did not hesitate to condemn miscegenation. Yet Long also recognized that once children were born, there was a powerful paternal connection that affected some fathers. Indeed, perhaps reflecting on the manumissions of Moll as well as Grace and Charles, he paradoxically concluded that the only way to stifle the growth of the mixed-race population was to force all slave owners to liberate all children of white fathers. If the colonial government were to make this rule compulsory, slave owners would bear a financial burden and, therefore, be incentivized to restrict employee, as well as their own, unbridled access to female slaves (Long 1774, vol. 2:333).

30 Nothing else is known about the third-party payee, Charles McDermit, other than that he lived in St Catherine and was dubbed a “Gentleman.” If Grace’s son Charles did take the surname McDermit, it raises the interesting possibility that these manumitteds and the payee were part of a prominent free family of color: six years after this manumission, a private act of the Assembly “intitle[d] Johanna Gaul, of the parish of St Thomas in the East ... a free mulatto woman, and several children and grand-children, named John M’Dermit, Jannet M’Dermit, Agnes Johanna Troup, Elizabeth Troup, Mary M’Dermit, and Elizabeth M’Dermit, to the Same rights and privileges with English subjects under certain restrictions” (21 Geo. 3 Private Acts).

In addition to the sugar grandees—such as the Prices, Edward and Mary Long, and Viscount and Lady Viscountess Dudley and Ward (*Manumission Liber* 1772–1774:292)³¹—the database contains manumitters that self-identified as tradesmen, fishermen, and boatmen as well as shopkeepers. To piece together the biographies of these men is impossible, given that contemporary printed sources largely ignored the island's white workforce. Even the merchants in the dataset are relatively unknown characters; among the merchant manumitters identified in the dataset, there are no members of the mighty house of Hibbert or the Bristol-Kingston partnership of Bright, Milward, and Duncombe.³² Rather, the 14 merchant manumitters consist of men who worked on their own account, as importers and as merchant bankers. Unsurprisingly, nine of these men made their home in Kingston, the island's premier port. The remaining island-based merchants all hailed from parishes west of the commercial capital, including St Catherine, St Elizabeth, and Westmoreland. One merchant, James Noble, and the manumittee identified as the “Negro man slave” named “Ned,” lived in Pensacola, West Florida (*Manumission Liber* 1772–1774:17).

What is striking about the merchant manumitter subpopulation is the clustering of fore- and surnames that reflect Sephardic identity: Daniel Almeyda, Moses Almeyda, Abraham DeLeon, Solomon Nunes Flamingo, Moses Gutierrez, Daniel Lopez Ruiz, and Abraham Solomons, together, freed 11 slaves between 1766 and 1774 (*Manumission Liber* 1772–1774:23, 96, 117, 174, 213, 365, 389, 390). Like the other merchants in the database, these men were small “traders” who focused on the “middle and lower” or nonplantation oriented commercial sector” of the island (August 1987:305; Brathwaite 1971:136–73).³³ Because of the size of their operations and their focus on local trade, very

31 Mary Lady Viscountess Dudley and Ward brought to her marriage an interest in Jamaica. It is likely that her investments consisted of two Clarendon estates (Whitney Estate and Rymesbury Estate) and one in Vere (New Yarmouth Estate). See Mary Lady Viscountess Dudley and Ward (née Carver), Legacies of British Slave-ownership database, <http://www.depts-live.ucl.ac.uk/lbs/person/view/2146638729>, accessed July 11, 2018.

32 Thomas Hibbert, Kingston slave trader, was “one of the principal and most opulent merchants in Kingston” (Hakewill 1825:57). For an analysis of the Kingston townhouse, Hibbert House, with its basement slave dungeon and slave sale yard, see Nelson 2016:34. Hibbert and his extended family in London and Manchester built a transatlantic commercial empire. See Hall et al. 2014:203–49, chapter 6. For a discussion on the establishment of Bright Milward and Duncombe, see Morgan 2007:54.

33 Long (1774, vol. 1:570, 573) remarks that in addition to trading and money lending, “industrious Jews [in Jamaica] carry on a profitable business by purchasing dollars with ryals [reals] of old plate [coin].” Later, Long writes that some Jewish shopkeepers were in the business of brewing, but a “drunken Jew is rarely seen” (Long 1774, vol. 2:29–30).

little is known about their respective businesses. We do know, however, that Solomon Nunes Flamingo, a prominent member of the Sephardic community, operated his business as a merchant bank, specializing in providing credit to locals.³⁴ Burnard points out that at the time of his death, 95 percent of Flamingo's nonfixed capital (£15,524) was devoted to loans made to other islanders. Like most Jews in Jamaica, however, he was a comparatively small slave owner, holding only six bondsmen at his death (Burnard 2015:200). In total, the proportion of Jewish manumitters was equivalent to the proportion of Jews in the free population (about 6 percent). Further, the proportion of mulatto children freed by Jews was similar to that of non-Jewish manumitters.³⁵ Jews were less likely to have been slaveholders (August 1987:305)³⁶ and, therefore, may have showed a greater propensity to manumit, all else equal, compared to Anglo-Saxon slave owners. Religious traditions favorable to manumission, combined with the concentrations of the Jewish community in towns (August 1987:304, 308)³⁷ may have encouraged the liberation of individual slaves, but more research is required before generalizing along these lines.

The prominence of women among the manumitters—who appear in one-fifth of the deeds—reflects recent observations about the role slavery played in reconstructing gender norms in the West Indies. According to Christine Walker, Cecily Jones, and others, the collective project of exploiting slaves led to an enhancement of free women's social and economic power in the Caribbean colonies, relative to that seen in Britain and much of the Anglophone Atlantic world.³⁸ The combination of high mortality, the subsequent frequency of widowhood, and the prevalence of absolute property rights over the bodies of enslaved people gave many middling women unparalleled financial agency.

34 In his complaint against the legally mandated differential in interest-rate caps, Long directs some unsavory remarks toward “some rich Jew[s]” who he claimed preyed on the deficient business and accounting practices of hapless planters (Long 1774, vol. 1:555–57).

35 Table 2 indicates that 39 percent of the manumitted people in the database were mulatto children. A recent study of 150 late eighteenth-century Jewish manumitters found that one-third of the people they freed were mixed-race children (Mirvis 2014:231).

36 The handful of examples of large Jewish planters in the eighteenth century include Isaac Feurtado, who owned one of the thirty estates situated in St Andrew. The 1753 census indicates that he owned 135 slaves who worked Golden Spring's 963 acres. See Greene 2016:107 and Ryden 2000:48.

37 According to Jonathan Schorsch (2009:85, 87), Jewish masters tended to follow the manumission custom in which they lived. Thus, as with the Christian population, manumission proved to be the exception, not the rule.

38 Jones 2003:195–231; Walker 2014:478–501; Zacek 2009:329–41.

The social and political capital that free women wielded in Jamaica was sustained by their willingness to embrace slave ownership, which had the effect of leveling “other categories of difference based on gender, race or economic status” (Walker 2014:492). While the occupations of the female manumitters are generally unknown (they are typically identified as widow, relict, spinster, or as a woman of color) recent research has found that free unwed Jamaican women fell into a broad band of occupations, ranging from petty traders (hucksters), to boarding housekeepers, to school mistresses, to merchants, to planters (Greene 2016:250–51). Perhaps unsurprisingly, the geographic distribution of female manumitters was concentrated in towns and cities: whereas just over 37 percent of manumission deeds were from Kingston or St Catherine, over 55 percent of the female manumitter subpopulation clustered in these two parishes.³⁹ In broad terms, the demographic profile of those manumitted by women was similar to that freed by men. Female manumitters, however, seem to have been reluctant to free girls: the data show that women freed half as many girls (11) as boys (22). This pattern may reflect statistical chance or, perhaps, indicate a reluctance among women slaveholders to part with female labor.

The least understood manumitters in the dataset are those of African ancestry. As with white female manumitters, the occupation of manumitters of color is rarely indicated. Instead, the records simply note the individual’s free status and phenotype, ranging from Black/Negro to light-skinned “quadroons.” This system of classifying people, which was adopted and simplified from Spanish law, ranked individuals based on the number of successive white fathers in their ancestry, as illustrated in Figure 2. In Jamaica, all who were deemed “above three degrees removed in lineal descent from the Negro ancestor” were permitted “to vote at elections, and enjoy all the privileges and immunities of his majesty’s white subjects” (Long 1774, vol. 2: 260–61). While this classification system was supposedly grounded in ancestry, the practical reality is that the distinctions between Negro, mulatto, sambo, quadroon, and octoroon was abandoned in everyday practice. This emphasis on outward appearances—including mannerism, color, and class—is seen in the illogical description of the “Negro girl Slave [manumittee] named Sally ... daughter of the Mulatto woman ... named Peggy” (*Manumission Liber* 1763–1774:38). The planter Bryan Edwards recognized that there was commonplace deviation from the classification system’s logic and explained that those of European and African descent

39 There was a similar concentration of female testators in the southern coastal towns (Walker 2014:483).

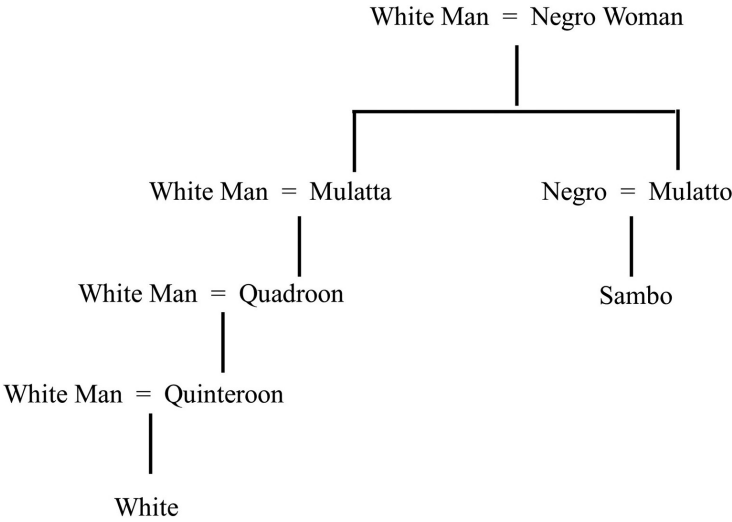


FIGURE 2 A rendering of Jamaica's color classification scheme
LONG 1774, VOL. 2:260–1

were most likely to be regarded as mulattos, rather than the finer distinctions of heredity.⁴⁰ It was nonetheless observed during the early years of the nineteenth century that successive generations of the mixed-race population were lighter-skinned. Simon Taylor noted that in 1760, there “were only three Quadroon Women in the Town of Kingston,” but by ca. 1800 there were over three hundred. They, and their “daughters,” recognized the social capital accrued from whiteness and refused to have “commerce with their own color.” The “progeny” was therefore “growing whiter and whiter,” thus leading Taylor to conclude that “a white generation,” as specified by Jamaican law, “will come in time.” Perhaps tacitly justifying the sexual proclivities of white men such as himself, he concluded that this was the only manner for establishing a “white population” on the island (Taylor 1803:42).

The free population of color grew impressively in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries thanks to the small, but steady, stream of manumissions. In 1768, the free population of color was 18 percent of the total free population. This share rose to 26 percent by 1789. In absolute terms, their numbers surged from 3,700 to 10,000.⁴¹ It is estimated that approximately 165 enslaved

40 Bryan Edwards noted, “All below ... the Negro venter ... whether called Mestizes, Quadroons, or Mulattoes, are deemed by law Mulattoes” (Edwards 1819: 20).
41 Calculated from figures put forth in Heuman 1981:7.

people were freed per year, thus suggesting that nearly 3,500 were liberated in this fashion over this 21 year period.

In light of the reputed poverty among the free population of color, it is not surprising to observe that this group is underrepresented in the population of manumitters. In Volume 11, a total of 16 different manumitters of color freed some 27 slaves. Thus, while free people of color comprised of nearly one-fifth of Jamaica's nonenslaved population, they accounted for only 4 percent of manumitters (just over half of these manumitters were identified as mulatto or quadroon). Given that "free Negroes" were perhaps the least likely to have inherited slaves, it is unsurprising that they represented only one-third of the nonwhite manumitters in the dataset: we do not have demographic data that would reveal the underlying composition of the free nonwhite population by phenotype, but, as a proxy, roughly 40 percent of those manumitted were identified as Negro or Black. Looking deeper into these individual deeds, it becomes apparent that some of the "free Negroes" manumitters were not quintessential slaveholders, but rather were *de jure* masters who had purchased loved ones or friends with the intent to manumit. Nearly all deeds are silent on the interrelationship between the parties noted, but John Cornelius, a Kingstonian free black fisherman, did indeed proclaim in April of 1774 that he was freeing his wife, Diana Cornelius, and their seven sons (*Manumission Liber* 1772–1774:55). Similarly, the "free Negro woman," Margaret Trusty, "of St. Ann's" freed "a certain Negro Girl child called Judith Stirling Trustee" (*Manumission Liber* 1772–1774:26–27), revealing the likelihood that Margaret had purchased her daughter with every intention of freeing her.

Both Negro and mulatto manumitters were distinct from the white manumitter population in that the former group consisted of fewer men than women: just over two-thirds of the manumitters of color were identified as women, whereas only one-fifth of their white counterparts were female. Again, while we do not know the underlying demographic structure of the free population of color, we do know that 60 percent of the manumitted in the dataset were female,⁴² indicating the likelihood that men and women of color served

42 It is worthwhile to note that the distribution of the manumitted by sex in the database aligns with what studies have found in other parts of the Greater Caribbean and South America. Stuart Schwartz found that 66 percent in a sample of Brazilian manumission deeds were female (Schwartz 1974:612). Lyman Johnson presents a comparison of manumission deeds from a number of Latin American cities and sees a range falling between 58 percent and 68 percent female (Johnson 1979:262). A study on the implementation of *coartación* in New Orleans found that 63 percent of the manumitted were female (Inger-

as manumitters in proportion to their respective numbers. It is also important to note that manumitters of African ancestry shared a literacy profile that was very different from that of Whites, with only 47 percent able to sign their names, compared to 94 percent of white manumitters. Last, it is worth observing that manumitters of color concentrated in the relatively urban Kingston and St Catherine, as well as parishes west of Kingston.⁴³

It was very difficult for the vast majority of slaves to ever imagine being manumitted, given the economic and collective resistance among Whites to support the liberation of people of color. Unlike Brazil or other Catholic slave societies, there was very little structural or societal encouragement of manumission in the British Caribbean. The manumitted, therefore, cannot be thought of as having been “typical” slaves or having suffered the typical slave experience. Rather, they were people who managed to acquire the social and human capital that gave them access to freedom as well as the confidence to survive as a free person in apartheid Jamaica. Even though they were exceptional in finding their way to freedom, very little is known about their lives after their enslavement. In general, the biographies of the newly freed were not recorded. Further, less than a third of manumitteds are identified by a last name, so the paper trail marking life events goes very cold, very fast, for most.

Of the 460 manumitteds recorded in the dataset, there are 316 people who can be identified by sex, phenotype, and crude age (Table 2). The demography of these manumitted people did not reflect Jamaica’s slave society, with only 12 percent men and 42 percent women. While the underlying slave population was probably no more than 10 percent mulatto, 53 percent of the manumitteds were identified as having both European and African ancestry. But this bias toward lighter skin was largely skewed by the children in the dataset, who were 95 percent mulatto, whereas the adult population was predominately Black/“Negro” (74 percent). The large share of mulatto children within the deeds conforms with Long’s handwringing over the attachment some white men felt for the children they had fathered, while the heavy concentration of

soll 1991:186). This majority female pattern can be seen in every age category in Louisiana manumitteds. See Cole 2005. But in Anglo North America, there was not the same preference for manumitting women relative to men. A Baltimore manumission study finds that 52 percent of the manumitteds were female (Whitman 1995:337). A study from Dutchess County New York from the same period found 53 percent of the manumitted population to be female (Groth 1997:37).

43 Both Negro and mulatto manumitters hailed from Kingston, St Catherine, Vere, and Westmoreland. One “Negro” manumitter in the database lived in St Ann, on the north side of the island.

TABLE 2 Percentage distribution of manumitteds by crude age, sex, and phenotype

| | Percent distribution by crude age, sex, and phenotype | Percent distribution by crude age and sex | Percent distribution by crude age |
|---------------|--|---|---|
| | (i) | (ii) | (iii) |
| Adults | | | 52.7 |
| Women | | 42.4 | |
| Mulatto Women | 10.8 | | |
| Negro Women | 31.6 | | |
| Men | | 12.0 | |
| Mulatto Men | 3.5 | | |
| Negro Men | 8.5 | | |
| Children | | | 47.3 |
| Girls | | 21.2 | |
| Mulatto Girls | 17.1 | | |
| Negro Girls | 4.1 | | |
| Boys | | 24.4 | |
| Mulatto Boys | 21.5 | | |
| Negro Boys | 2.8 | | |
| Sum: | 100% | 100% | 100% |
| N: | 316 | 316 | 334 |

Notes: There are some 18 cases where neither the sex nor phenotype of “children” was noted. Hence, the final column has 334 observations, whereas the first two have 316. Those identified as “quadroon” etc. are categorized in this table as “mulatto.”

FIGURES CALCULATED FROM *MANUMISSION LIBER 1772–1774*

women—relative to men—might reflect the affection white men expressed for their concubines. In total, nearly 40 percent of the manumitteds were identified as mulatto children.

Just under half of the manumitteds were freed as part of a group, on a single deed.⁴⁴ The average number of people freed as a group is 2.97 per manumis-

44 There are 245 deeds that freed single individuals and 72 deeds that liberated between two

sion record. The largest group manumitted on a single record was that of the above-mentioned Carwallis family, which involved the liberation of a mother and seven sons. Among the 72 individual manumission deeds that freed two or more people, nearly 20 percent identified a mother present, eight percent note siblings with no mother present, and two identified a grandmother present. In other words, nearly 30 percent of these group manumissions described family relationship, whereas other families, such as the Trusty's likely freed themselves via a succession of deeds, akin to a chain migration into freedom.

Evidence of Manumission's Market Mechanism

As mentioned above, approximately one-third of the manumission deeds from the 1770s document a bona fide payment in excess of 10s. While the legal language of the deeds suggests a clear narrative of the manumission process, the documents offer little information to help disentangle the complex relationships and motivations that were embedded in each bargain. The most perplexing aspect of the paid manumission deeds is the ambiguity regarding the source of the payment. On the one hand, the notion that slaves paid for their own freedom, through a third-party sponsor, seems to be supported by Edward Long's observations regarding the entrepreneurial spirit among slaves, who despite their harsh working lives still managed to independently market their produce grown in garden plots and polinks. Long argued in his *History of Jamaica* that slaves controlled the majority of the island's circulating small silver and that capital accumulation among individual slave families was impressive: he wrote that one should not be surprised to learn that an "industrious" plantation slave could "lay up" to "20 *l.* or 30 *l.*" and that a particularly entrepreneurial or fortunate slave might accumulate between "50 *l.* to 200 *l.* at the time of their death" (Long 1774, vol. 2:410–11; Mintz & Hall 1970:3–26). The prevalence of protopeasant farming and marketing among plantation slaves—not to mention the economic opportunities afforded to urban slaves working on their own time—supports D.A. Dunkley's assertion that nineteenth-century manumittedes were active agents in purchasing their

and eight people. Approximately 45 percent of those freed in this dataset were liberated as a group. Compare this with North America, where one study of Maryland manumissions estimated that 80 percent of manumittedes were freed on deeds containing more than one other newly freed person (Condon 2011:77).

own freedom (Dunkley 2013: 174–75.) Unfortunately, however, the deeds from the 1770s rarely describe manumittees actually buying their way out of slavery.

Only four of the 317 deeds indicate a slave purchasing his or her own freedom. Of these four, just a single “Negro Man,” named “Duke,” paid more than the standard token 5s. or 10s.: his owner, George Brooks, declared that he was moved to agree to the manumission “in Consideration of the Sum of Sixty Pounds current money of Jamaica to me in hand paid by my Negro man slave named Duke” (*Manumission Liber* 1772–1774:207). Yet, even though the deeds usually fail to identify self-purchases, it has been suggested that third-party sponsors were responsible for transferring the money from the soon-to-be-freed slave to the manumitter. In this fashion, the deed would have addressed the “inalienability problem,” which Orlando Patterson identifies as the fundamental internal contradiction associated with self-purchase. Given that “everything the slave is and enjoys belongs to the master” under the law, “then by definition it is never possible for the slave to buy back his freedom from his own resources.” Thus, the appearance of a third party in the manumission contracts may have been a ceremonial attempt to mitigate the inherent lapse in the logic underpinning slave law. Patterson notes that the “problem of alienating the slave from master is not solved but simply passed along to the third party, who now owns the slave” (Patterson 1982:209–10).⁴⁵ One can intuit, however, that the third-party payee solution served to muddy the payment’s origin and therefore gave the manumission deed the legal bearing required for it to function as intended.

It is intriguing to interpret the bulk of paid manumissions as an indication of the manumittee’s agency. I suspect, however, that most of these bona fide payments were instigated by white men, who hoped to buy the liberty of those for whom they held affection. A close reading of Long’s description payment process reveals the informal nature of self-purchase on the island; he explained that buying one’s freedom usually took place via a series of small payments, under an informal installment plan. Slaves, he wrote, “who have been permitted to work for themselves,” would win their freedom by “only paying a certain

45 Examples of third-party participation in manumission records can be found in other parts of the Atlantic basin, such as Brazil (Libby 2009:216). Sumner Eliot Matison notes that in North America, the third party might have served as a de facto bank when the owner was not to be trusted. He also notes that in the United States, three states made it legal for slaves to engage in contracts leading to their self-purchase, thereby creating a legal opening for slaves to purchase their own freedom without the assistance of a third party (Matison 1948:154, 165–66).

weekly or monthly sum” (Long 1774, vol. 2:322) to their master rather than a lump payment on manumission day. Thus, it is entirely plausible that the bulk of self-purchase manumissions are actually hidden among the gratis deeds within the dataset.

We will never know the origins of money applied to the purchase of approximately 150 manumittedes in the database, but the recorded payments tended to reflect market valuations. Aggregating all the paid deeds, the estimated average price of freedom in the 1770s was £55 5s., which aligns roughly with the Eltis-Lewis-Richardson slave-price estimate of £60 (Eltis, Lewis & Richardson 2005:679).⁴⁶ Breaking down the manumission figures along the lines of crude age, the estimated manumission price of freedom for adults is £60 12s. and for children £33 16s.⁴⁷ While a larger dataset might produce definitive price differences between manumitter and manumittedee characteristics (such as parish of residence, phenotype, sex, occupation, and so on), the present data indicate that absentees typically demanded higher payments (an additional £24 5s. 7d.) in comparison to their on-the-spot counterparts. Of the 18 freed by a British-based master, at least nine manumittedes were mulatto children, which was twice the proportion seen among the general manumitted population. This suggests, at the very least, that absentee planters demanded a premium price when liberating the children of their white workers.

This exploitation of the love and affection Whites held for their children is illustrated in the largest financial transaction in the database. In this case, the “Mulatto man slave” named Thomas Drummond was liberated in 1773 for an extraordinary sum. The payee, John Drummond, was a Westmoreland parish physician who fathered Thomas (34 Geo. 3 Private Acts). The manumitters, John and Elizabeth Fitzgerald, also of Westmoreland, demanded from Dr. Drummond £300, which is six deviations greater from the average price charged (*Manumission Liber* 1772–1774:386). The infamous Thomas Thistlewood—a small slaveholder and diarist (Burnard 2004)—was incredulous upon hearing of the bargain struck between the slave physician and the Fitzgeralds, noting in his November 16 journal entry that he “[h]eard today ... that Dr. Drum-

46 The sterling-reported prices for the Caribbean were converted into Jamaican current money based on McCusker 1978:253. Note the Jamaica-based probate inventory estimated median prices produce a similar result: just under £60, nominal money (Ryden 2009:296–97).

47 These prices are disaggregated via a hedonic linear regression, which produces the following point and model estimates: $\text{MANUMISSION PRICE} = 14.38 + 60.6 \text{ ADULT} + 33.8 \text{ CHILD}$; $N = 81$; $R^2 = 0.18$. For an explanation on the application of hedonic regression to slave price data, see Galenson 1986:73–74, 191–92, 53–69.

mond has bought Mulatto Tommy Drummond from John Fitzgerald, at a vast price, & given him free" (Hall 1989:232).⁴⁸

Manumission was the consequence of the social and economic capital wielded by the manumittees and/or by the affection that Whites held for those who were freed. The multidimensional motivations that underlie these ostensible acts of kindness make it difficult to attribute the degree to which slave agency or master benevolence was responsible for the manumission of a select few. Nonetheless, all slaves who found their way to freedom via (1) self-purchase; (2) the emotional connections they cultivated with Whites; or (3) the fidelity they showed to their masters played an active role in becoming free. Only small children were passive figures in the freedom process.

Manumission's demographic and social impact on the slave population was negligible, but the freeing of enslaved people played a key role in the surge of the island's free population of color. Throughout the slave period, only a small proportion of slaves were able to find their way into freedom: the manumission rate probably approached one per thousand slaves by the close of the century before increasing to its highest levels of 1.5 per thousand during the 1820s.⁴⁹ While a small sliver relative to the island's enslaved population, manumittees had an enormous impact on free society. During the half century following ca. 1774, the percentage increase in the number freedmen and women outstripped the population growth (and eventual decline) of the island's white population. Thus, despite the increased anxiety regarding these trends—expressed by Edward Long and others—Jamaican society honored the legal mechanism that accommodated the individual impulse to liberate select slaves, thereby giving both manumitters and manumittees faith in the process. Over time, manumission agreements became increasingly formal, transactional affairs so that by the 1820s over half of these freedom contracts involved payment.⁵⁰ The deeds reflected conventional property transfers, with

48 Thistlewood's diary entry found in Livesay (2018:63) notes that Tom stayed with Thistlewood for a week while Mr. Mordiner was away.

49 The rate of manumission for the 1790s is based on a one-and-four sample of the Manumission Deed books. For the 1820s, the rate of 1.5 per thousand is based on Higman's reckoning that 500 slaves were freed each year (Higman 1995:183, 256). The average annual number of slaves manumitted between 1808 and 1830 was 454 per year according to parliamentary figures (Dunkley 2013:177–78).

50 The percentage of paid manumissions "grew from an estimated 18 per cent in the 1740s to well over 35 percent in the last two decades of the century" (Ryden 2000:163). "After 1826 the number of manumissions paid for began to exceed those granted gratuitously" (Higman 1995:178).

both law and society consistently respecting the freedom of the manumittedes and their descendants.⁵¹ By the time the slave trade was abolished (1807), the free population of color was in excess of 10,000, making it roughly one-third the entire free population.

The deeds document the demographic impact of manumission with some precision, but the legal ease of these records fail to capture the voice of those manumitted. The manuscripts throughout the slavery period are virtually silent as to what freedom meant to those liberated: if we ever hear their words, it is through the correspondence of Whites. Nonetheless, it takes little imagination to intuit that the transition from slavery to freedom was momentous for former slaves. These records, therefore, are the most comprehensive documents of the intense drama lived by those lucky enough to have secured their freedom. Jamaica's manumission deeds may be silent in reconstructing individual narratives, but taken as a whole, they testify loudly to the inherent contradiction between the legal fiction that defined slaves as inanimate chattel and the agency of the oppressed.

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51 I have not come across any eighteenth-century accounts of Jamaican Whites attacking the freedom of firmly established free people of color, such as when the Saint-Domingue government, in early 1770, threatened Paul Carenan, a light-skinned propertied man of color, who could “not furnish documentary proof of his freedom.” The court overturned this challenge, but it made the point that in Saint-Domingue, “all people of color, no matter their wealth or European ancestry, were just a step from slavery” (Burnard & Garrigus 2016:185).

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