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Escaping slavery in a Caribbean plantation society : marronage in Barbados, 1650s-1830s

Disputes the idea that Barbados was too small for slaves to run away. Author describes how slaves in Barbados escaped the plantations despite the constraints of a relatively numerous white population, an organized militia, repressive laws, and deforestation. Concludes that slave flight was an enduring element of Barbadian slave society from the 17th c. to emancipation.

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ESCAPING SLAVERY IN A CARIBBEAN PLANTATION  
SOCIETY: MARRONAGE IN BARBADOS, 1650s-1830s<sup>1</sup>

SLAVE FLIGHT: AN OVERVIEW

The island of Barbados was England's first American colony to develop plantation sugar production dependent on African slave labor. By the 1670s, Barbados' population of African birth or descent was almost double the combined total in England's five other Caribbean colonies and close to six times the total in all of England's mainland colonies (Handler & Pohlmann 1984:391; Rickford & Handler 1994:225, 230, 238). From the last half of the 1600s through the early 1700s, Barbados was the wealthiest and most populous colony in English America and played a major role in the South Atlantic system that linked Africa with Europe and the Americas (e.g., Dunn 1969; Eltis 1995). The island's importance in the British sugar empire decreased by the early eighteenth century, but until emancipation in 1834-38 Barbados remained a plantation-slave colony, politically and economically dominated by a small white plantocracy (a high percentage of which was resident and native-born) and with a slave population that vastly outnumbered free persons (Handler 1974:18-19).

Slave resistance in Barbados, as elsewhere in the New World, assumed a variety of forms from work stoppages and feigning illness to revolt plots, temporary unauthorized absences, and permanent escapes. Slave flight or marronage, although not always with the intent or hope of permanently escaping the slave system, was a characteristic feature of Barbadian slave society as it was of slave societies throughout the Americas (e.g., Price 1979; Morgan & Nicholls 1998). However, for much of the slave period, Barbados, a small (166 square miles), relatively flat, and densely popu-

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lated island, presented obstacles of concealment and escapee community formation that were absent or not encountered in the larger mainland or island territories with mountains and heavy forests, small white populations, and light population densities. Nonetheless, marronage in one form or another occurred throughout the period of slavery in Barbados, and the island provides an excellent case study for exploring this form of resistance among the Caribbean's smaller sugar islands, ones that scholars do not conventionally associate with marronage (cf. Gaspar 1979a). Since Barbados' manumission rates were so low (Handler 1974:48-50; Handler & Pohlmann 1984), marronage was probably the major way that slaves escaped the slave system even though their numbers must have been very small compared to the size of the general slave population. In any case, governmental authorities and slaveowners considered slave flight a serious offense, and it was of continuous concern to them throughout the slave period.

Maroons in Barbados, as throughout the New World, directly challenged the authority system not only by the mere act of unauthorized absence from their masters, but also by reducing the master's work force, depriving him of their labor, and, in effect, denying him control over his own property. They sometimes fled the island completely and could directly or indirectly incite or encourage other slaves to leave their masters. Particularly in the seventeenth century, but also in later years, they were not easy to locate, and often engaged in direct action against white persons and their properties, living off the land and stealing food. For slaveowners, the existence of Maroons was a disruption in the social order, as their presence might have been an inspiration for the wider slave population.

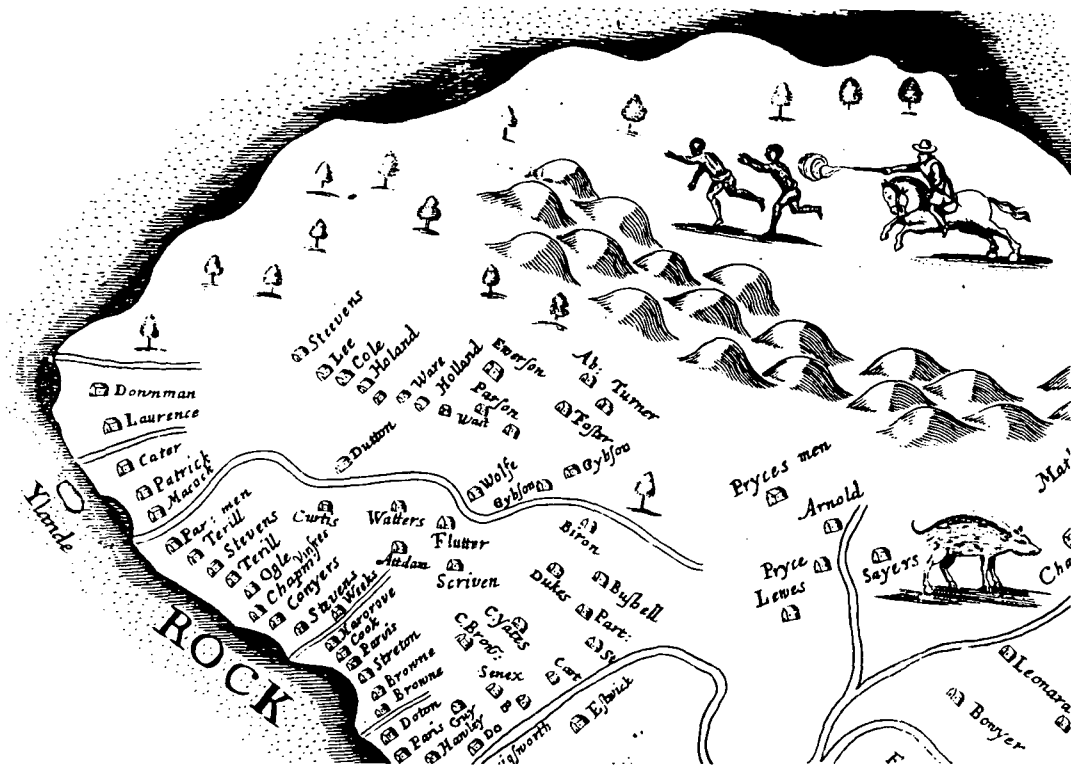
Evidence for slave master concern over Maroons or "runaways" (the conventional term used in the primary sources of Anglo-America) and the unauthorized movement of slaves from their properties occurs early in Barbadian history. This concern is well reflected in laws enacted during a period when most slaves were African-born. Prior to 1655 at least eleven laws, possibly a few more, dealt entirely or partially with marronage. Some of these laws are known only by published title, the original texts having disappeared in archival repositories. Other early laws with texts, as well as those enacted later in the seventeenth century, plainly show the plantocracy's major concern with marronage: all laws dealing with runaways detail and refine in one form or another the mechanisms for their arrest, confinement, return to owners, and punishment.<sup>2</sup>

To facilitate the identification of possible Maroons, as well as to exert greater control over slave "wandering," slaves away from their masters'

properties were required to carry a written authorization, signed by the master or his agent, permitting the slave to be temporarily absent and attesting that he was on his master's "necessary" or "lawful business." The legal requirement of an authorizing document (which also applied to white indentured servants in the earlier periods<sup>3</sup>) was first enacted in 1652, possibly somewhat earlier (Jennings 1654:20-21, 81-83). It was modified and elaborated in greater detail in a major 1661 law. The fact that 16 or 17 of this law's 23 clauses directly or indirectly related to Maroons reflects the legislature's concern with their increased numbers and the security problems they caused. The 1661 provisions concerning a "ticket" were slightly modified in 1676; although both laws were later repealed, their principal features were incorporated into the comprehensive slave act of August 1688 which added some refinements.<sup>4</sup>

The 1688 requirements endured until 1826 when all existing slave laws were repealed and a new slave code was adopted, the "slave consolidation act"—the most comprehensive slave law in Barbados' history.<sup>5</sup> This new code, despite its elaborate detail, did not require "tickets." This omission perhaps reflects how easily the provision was violated and "tickets" forged as slave literacy increased in the early nineteenth century (Handler 1974:172-89). For the first time this law made "forgery" a capital offense for slaves, punishable by death, as was murder, rape, and conspiracy to revolt. Although carrying written authorization was a fundamental feature of the social control system employed by whites for well over a hundred years, it is unknown to what extent it was enforced and how effectively it helped to inhibit slaves from unauthorized absences.

Slave flight assumed several forms. In the earliest phases of the period of plantation slavery, when the island was still heavily wooded, marronage involved small bands living in the forested interior and raiding plantations and farms for foodstuffs. Nothing can be said about how these bands were initially formed, and presumably most slaves fled from their masters singly or in pairs to join these bands. Other slaves may have hid out in the forests alone, or fluctuated between being alone and membership in a band. During the early periods, other slaves sometimes attempted, and occasionally succeeded, escaping Barbados completely. As the years progressed, slaves continued their efforts to escape the island while others, individually or in small groups of perhaps no more than two or three, sought permanent refuge in natural hiding places in the countryside. Still others hoped for escape by achieving anonymity in the towns, sometimes successfully passing as freedmen (cf. Handler 1974:5-6) for extended periods. Regardless of the form that slave flight assumed, J. Harry Bennett's (1958:26) comments on the Codrington plantations in the eighteenth



Section of map in Richard Ligon's *A True and Exact History of the Iland of Barbados* (1657), showing a European on horseback chasing two maroons, as well as coastal (leeward) plantations (published with permission, Special Collections Department, University of Virginia Library).

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century can be readily generalized to the island's plantations as a whole: "Year in and year out," he wrote, "the most serious disciplinary problem ... was desertion."

### MARRONAGE: THE EARLY YEARS

Despite the difficulties in establishing the motivations and specific reasons for flight, during the the earliest years of slavery in the seventeenth century, Maroons, most of whom were probably African-born (as in other New World areas, e.g., Price 1979; Morgan & Nicholls 1998), aspired to permanent escape and formed or joined small bands in Barbados' forested interior. These slaves had the goal "to run for freedom" and attempted "to live another life outside of the social order of the plantation" (Manigat 1977:423). Scholars do not conventionally associate this kind of marronage with as small and non-mountainous an area as Barbados, and the island's geography could not generally and effectively provide the stable, "almost inaccessible" and "inhospitable, out-of-the-way areas" required for developing viable Maroon communities that could exist more or less independently of plantations (Price 1979:5). However, in its early years, Barbados contained many places of refuge for groups of escapees and marronage did occur.

At its colonization by the English (who brought with them a handful of captured Africans) in 1627, Barbados was heavily forested. For example, Richard Ligon (1657:23), who lived in Barbados from 1647 to 1650, learned from several of the island's "most ancient planters," that Barbados' first groups of colonists found the island "so overgrown with wood, as there could be found no champions [field of military exercise], or savannas for men to dwell in." Early farms were primarily situated along the western (or leeward) coast (see, for example, the map in Ligon; Figure 1), but as the population expanded, and especially with the growth of sugar plantations in the 1640s, forests were more extensively cleared. Whereas in 1647-50 Ligon (1657:24) reported that "the woods were so thick, and most of the trees so large and massive, ... they were not to be false with so few" people, by the 1650s and 1660s most forest land had been destroyed; by the mid-1660s "all but the smallest traces of forest had been removed through felling or burning" (Watts 1966:62).<sup>6</sup> The rapidly changing ecology of Barbados during this period had important implications for the nature of marronage.

In 1648, an English visitor, perhaps overstating the numbers, referred to the "many hundreds of rebel Negro slaves in the woods" (Plantagenet

1648). Richard Ligon (1657:105), arguably the best-known primary source for seventeenth-century British Caribbean social history, referred to his residence on the island during the late 1640s, when he mentioned the slaves who “harbour themselves in woods and caves, living upon pillage for many months together.” Life on the sugar plantations during this period was extremely harsh and brutal, and although life for the Maroons also must have been very harsh, the caves, Ligon wrote (1657:98),

are very frequent, some small, others extremely large and capacious. The runaway Negroes often shelter themselves in these coverts ... and in the night range abroad the countrey, and steale pigs, plantins, potatoes, and pullin, and bring it there; and feast all day, upon what they stole the night before; and the nights being dark, and their bodies black, they scape undiscern'd.<sup>7</sup>

Such caves, many examples of which can be seen today (e.g., Lange & Handler 1980; Gurnee 1980), were, as they still are, scattered about the island. Also there were (and still are) abundant forested gullies throughout Barbados' parishes. Maroons could conceal themselves “for a long time” (Ligon 1657:98), and often engaged in actions that whites found threatening and criminal. “Great mischief arises,” reported a 1676 slave law, “from the frequent running away and hiding out of Negroes whereby they become desperate rogues,” and fifteen years earlier, a 1661 act also stressed how whites “have much suffered by the running away of Negroes” who “do continually much mischief.”<sup>8</sup> In June 1657, the Barbados Council received a complaint that “divers rebellious and runaway Negroes ... lurking in woods and secret places ... in the parish of St. Joseph [in the Scotland District] are committing many violences and attempting to assassinate people”; a few months later the legislature requested the governor to appoint “a certain day” and “issue commissions for a general hunting ... throughout the island of ... the great number of Negroes that are out in rebellion committing murders, robberies, and divers other mischiefs.”<sup>9</sup>

Incidents such as the preceding apparently involved marauding bands of Maroons (rather than slaves operating as isolated individuals) and were not necessarily viewed by whites as organized conspiracies for large-scale risings; yet the existence of Maroon bands clearly had that potential and afforded opportunities, as noted in the 1661 act, “for raising mutinies or rebellion.” Maroon bands not only engaged in direct action against white persons and property (including setting cane fires), but also they were difficult to locate, “hiding themselves, sometimes in one place and sometimes in another, so that with much difficulty they are to be found, unless by some sudden surprise.”<sup>10</sup> As late as 1692, shortly after the discovery of

a major slave conspiracy (cf. Handler 1982), the Barbados legislature passed a law which emphasized that slaves could successfully escape for extended periods “and by their long absence from the service of their owners, they become desperate, and daily plot and commit felonies and other enormities” (Hall 1764:130-31). The Newton plantation attorney also complained to the plantation’s owners in 1693 of his “continual trouble ... [ in] “daily hunting and seeking after ... notorious runaway negroes,” and suggested that “good negroes” purchased in the future should be branded “with N, which method you will find ... very advantageous to your interest” (Bate 1693); the contemporary sources do not suggest that his experiences and recommendations were unique.

Both the 1692 law and the Newton attorney were probably referring to Maroons who were operating singly or in very small groups. For as the years progressed, and by the last quarter or so of the seventeenth century, ecological changes in Barbados depleted the forests and fundamentally altered the opportunities for forming larger Maroon bands and the chances of their evading capture for relatively long periods. Moreover, the caves, too, became more accessible to white patrols. Large-scale marronage seems to have ended, for all intents and purposes, by the last quarter of the seventeenth century (cf. Gaspar 1979a and 1979b).

Because of sparse information, it is difficult to neatly place Barbados’ early Maroons into the conventional typology of *petit* and *grand marronage*. Although “this distinction ... does not preclude the existence of borderline cases and the possibility of a shift from one to the other” (Manigat 1977:423), the typology implies or requires an imputation of motives to Maroons as well as an assessment of the objective behaviors in which they engaged. Debien (1979:111) views *petit marronage* as “an act of individuals or at most of very small groups” who stayed close to the plantations from which they escaped and “subsisted not by systematically pillaging crops but by stealing small amounts of food and committing minor thefts, in a kind of symbiosis with the plantation.” For Manigat (1977:423) in *petit marronage* “the fugitive slave runs wild spontaneously,” remains at large for only “a few days ... and always leaves open the possibility of a quick return at the most propitious moment” while Richard Price (1979:3; cf. Higman 1984:386) defines *petit marronage* as “repetitive or periodic truancy with temporary goals such as visiting a relative or lover on a neighboring plantation.” Whichever definition or emphasis is accepted, the term is clearly applicable to what sometimes occurred among Barbados’ early Maroons, and Price’s definition applies throughout the slave period in Barbados.

However, during the colony’s early years, despite the geographic and



demographic factors that prevented “marronage on the grand scale” that occurred elsewhere in the New World such as Jamaica or the Guianas, and which involved the formation of “independent communities ... that struck directly at the foundations of the plantation system” (Price 1979:3), some of Barbados’ early bands apparently approached a form of *grand marronage*, that is, “flight from the plantation with no intention of ever returning” (Debien 1979:107). These early Maroon bands may have unrealistically judged the degree of refuge Barbados could ultimately provide, and many bands may have been only short-lived. However, the actions of these bands, as suggested by the sources, indicate that the Maroons perceived their absenteeism as more than temporary escape and had a goal “to stay free as long as possible ... at least to the limit of human resistance” (Manigat 1977:423). As time progressed, in Barbados, as Gaspar (1979b:13) observed for Antigua during the early eighteenth century, “few [Maroon bands] could expect to remain at large for long ... [but] expecting capture sooner or later, enjoyed freedom while it lasted by openly defying the authorities.”

#### REFUGE IN BARBADOS

With the continuing removal of Barbados’ forest cover as plantation acreage expanded and sugar production increased during the last half of the seventeenth century, opportunities decreased for the survival of Maroon bands. Yet, individuals continued to abscond, and even as late in the deforestation process as 1727, for example, the catechist at the Codrington plantations complained that Barbadian slaves showed their “proneness to run away from their masters, into the woods for months together” (quoted in Bennett 1958:26). Nonetheless, as the years progressed, the island’s small size and lack of major forests and mountains, combined with extensive agricultural development, population growth, a relatively large resident white population, and an organized militia, subjected Maroons to an intense pressure which afforded few opportunities for permanent refuge. As William Dickson (1814:440) – who lived in Barbados as the governor’s secretary in the 1770s and early 1780s and was very knowledgeable about island conditions – among others, observed in the late eighteenth century: “Barbados contains fewer hiding places for runaways than any other West Indian colony.”

But “fewer” did not mean “none,” and despite limited natural refuge areas, such areas existed and were exploited by Maroons until very late in the slave period. Visiting Barbados in 1833, Thomas Rolph (1836:29)

described the gullies and ravines along the road that meandered through the rugged upland country from Vacluse to Bloomsbury plantations in St. Thomas parish.<sup>11</sup> He learned that in earlier times, probably in the late eighteenth century perhaps even the early nineteenth,

In many of these deep gullies, muffled ... in the luxuriant drapery of tropical shrubs and trees, and rendered inaccessible, many runaway Negroes have remained secreted for years, baffling and defying every search made for them; the militia have been compelled, sometimes, to go out in exploring parties to ferret them out.

Known to black populations from the earliest periods, Barbados' caves also served as natural hiding places in later periods. But it became increasingly difficult for Maroons to remain at large for an extended time while living in natural refuges and depending solely on their own cunning and resources to acquire food and other material necessities. Thus, from an early period Maroons were assisted by their fellow slaves, and this practice apparently became more important (at least it became more noticeable to whites) as time went by.

That the practice of slaves hiding and assisting other slaves occurred at an early date is suggested by the 1661 slave law mentioned above. One of its many clauses relating to Maroons directed plantation managements to search their slave houses twice weekly for fugitives; the same directive was essentially repeated in the major 1688 act, but the searches were now to be conducted twice monthly (Hall 1764:114). The 1688 act remained on the books until 1826 when the "slave consolidation act" merely authorized the raising of militia units to search slave houses "for fugitive or runaway slaves," illegal weapons, etc. whenever the occasion demanded.<sup>12</sup> I do not know to what extent the 1661 and 1688 laws were followed – even though they were enacted at a time when whites acutely feared Maroon bands and the possibility of slave revolts (Handler 1982). Nonetheless, the fact that the legislature ordered periodic searches of slave houses indicates an awareness that slaves were possibly harboring Maroons; the order also suggests that this practice was occurring with some regularity at least by the second half of the seventeenth century.

The practice of harboring Maroons in the slave quarters or plantation villages, also common elsewhere (e.g., Price 1979:13; Morgan 1985:71), became firmly embedded in the fabric of slave social life. The plantocracy formally acknowledged the practice in 1731 with passage of "an act for the punishment of run-away slaves." This act noted that slaves "often run away and absent themselves," and are "wilfully entertained, harboured and concealed by other slaves, to the great detriment of the owners of

such run-away slaves, and to the grievous mischief of the inhabitants of this island” (Hall 1764:286-87). The 1826 “slave consolidation act” also invoked sanctions against any slave who hid or assisted a Maroon.

Maroons were not only hidden and fed by other slaves, but also they were materially helped in other ways. In 1736, for example, the rector of St. Michael parish wrote that although only a “few” Barbadian slaves “read and write tolerably well,” they “often” applied their literacy skills “to their owner’s detriment by forging their hands” and “giving tickets to runaways.”<sup>13</sup> In early 1819, as a specific case, Sam’s owner advertised for his return, claiming that Sam had obtained a “forged letter” in his owner’s handwriting authorizing his absence.<sup>14</sup> The practice of forgery probably increased over the years as slave literacy increased and may be a major reason why, as suggested earlier, tickets or written authorizations were not required by the “slave consolidation act.”

A 1708 law (Baskett 1732:222-23) suggests another way slaves may have assisted Maroons. When the law was passed, slaveowners “often” placed metal “pot-hooks and rings, or collars” so that if slaves absconded again they could be more easily identified and captured. The law observed that “of late some persons” (racial group not specified) removed these objects so that Maroons could not be identified “and thereby keep out much longer”; the law forbade the removal of these objects and for violations specified fines for whites and whipping for slaves. The inclusion of sanctions against slaves suggests that they, as well as whites, engaged in the actions the law attempted to eliminate.

Slaves clearly assisted Maroons, but the social rules or norms of an emerging creole slave culture which presumably governed these assistance patterns are unknown. What obligations, if any, would a slave on one plantation feel toward an absentee from another plantation; and what expectations would the latter have of the former? Would strangers be expected to help strangers and how strong were such expectations? Were slaves who were socially linked to Maroons by friendship or kinship ties expected, because of such links, to assist their friends or kin? Sparse information precludes direct and detailed answers to such questions, but at least one important norm seems to have been that a close kin or friend (e.g., a parent, “wife” or a stable sexual partner) was expected, as a feature of the relationship, to provide assistance if requested. How effectively this norm worked in actual cases cannot be established.

The evidence that this norm existed (and, by extension, its reflection of the importance that slaves attached to family or other emotional ties) is, of necessity, indirect and inferential: however, it is strongly suggested by newspaper advertisements publicizing runaways and offering rewards for

their return. At the minimum, as was typical throughout Anglo-America, such advertisements specified the absentees' physical characteristics, e.g., sex, approximate age or age group, "racial" features, stature, distinguishing marks. Also they often indicated or suggested locales where the slaves might be found. When the name and residence of an absentee's close kin was known, this information was also given, as illustrated in the following excerpts from typical advertisements in the *Barbados Mercury* for January and February, 1816:

Lydia Ann, aged about 13 or 14, was "supposed to be harboured about Baxter's road, for in that neighborhood she has a mother named Kate Harper ... and her father, ... Harry Grant, belonging to Mrs. Thorne"

Abraham was "supposed to be with his wife at Mr. Israel Armstrong's near Holligan's"

Sally, who apparently normally lived in Bridgetown, "was suspected of being harboured at ... Vaucluse ... where she has connections"

Frank was "likely" to "be harboured by his father, Cuffy Jones, ... at St. Ann's"

and Betty, "well known in town and market, ... most likely is harboured by her husband, ... Dicky Bird, belonging to Newton Estate, or her son Robert (a carpenter) living with his wife at Mr. T. Brown's Place ... The Hope, Christ Church; she has a sister belonging to Mrs. Patrick, near ... [Codrington] College, where she may also be harboured." Later and earlier newspapers also show this advertising pattern.<sup>15</sup>

Barry Higman (1984:390), in his major study of British Caribbean slavery during the early nineteenth century, also implied the general existence of this norm throughout the British Caribbean. He suggested that Barbadian cases of kin-harboring "were common" because "cross-plantation mating was frequent and the density of kin great." In his statistical analysis of nineteenth-century Barbados newspaper advertisements, Heuman (1985:107-8) also found confirmation for this norm, and inferred that more than double the slaves in his sample were "supposedly harboured by family as by non-family members." Parent-child relationships were the most important, but so was husband-wife; to a lesser degree, but "not insignificant," were sibling relationships. Interestingly, "parents emerge as the kin who harboured runaways for the longest average time." Some family members who hid Maroons may have been freedmen. Freedmen sometimes had slave kin, such as children or wives who, for one reason or another, they were unable to manumit.<sup>16</sup>

I do not mean to imply that only kinsmen or close (sexual) friends were expected to hide Maroons, but newspaper advertisements suggest that this expectation was an important feature of the kin and affinal connec-

tion; and, conversely, one significant dimension of these bonds was that they involved obligations to render assistance to close affines or kin who absconded from their masters.

Newspaper advertisements not only indicate that slave families were dispersed over the island, but also they suggest another possible aspect of marronage. That is, many slaves reported as runaways, especially during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, may not have hoped or desired permanent escape from the slave system; rather, they viewed themselves as temporary absentees with short-term goals of being with close kinsmen or lovers. Although whites probably considered that many of these slaves were trying to permanently escape their masters' control, the slaves themselves viewed their absences as ways to visit people with whom they felt emotionally linked. From the perspective of the slave, then, a nonauthorized absence might have been the only available mechanism whereby a close relationship could be affirmed and solidified. "Visiting," Philip Morgan (1985:69, 72) has written for Colonial South Carolina, "is most significant in demonstrating the range and strength of slave kin ties." Whether such visiting behaviors can be identified as resistance in the strictest sense is doubtful. Yet, such behaviors deprived masters of slave labor and challenged their authority by non-authorized absences; in this sense they were a form of resistance, albeit not an explicitly intentional one.

Whether seeking temporary or permanent escape, plantation slaves went to other rural areas or, more commonly as the years progressed and as urban populations grew, sought the towns, especially Bridgetown, the island's capital and major urban center. For skilled slaves, the towns afforded greater employment opportunities; for those seeking permanent escape the towns provided opportunities to find ship captains who would take them abroad (see below). The relative anonymity of the towns, particularly Bridgetown, also permitted absentees (whether of rural or urban origin) to conduct their daily lives under the pretext of being free. This urban attraction, also evident in other colonies (e.g., Higman 1984:387; Morgan 1985:67) is often reflected in newspaper advertisements: for example, an owner reported that Thomas "is a very artful fellow, and may undertake to pass himself as a freeman"; another owner observed that Hamlet "has a [good] deal to say for himself, [and] may easily pass for a free man" (quoted in Heuman 1985: 99); and a third owner, reporting on a "young mulatto," a carpenter named Jack, with "a very fair complexion [and] light hair" had "no doubt" that Jack "passes for a white man."<sup>17</sup> Attempting to pass often exacerbated an already existing problem for freedmen who could be arrested as runaways and ultimately sold as slaves

if their free status could not be successfully proven or validated. Over the years Maroons increasingly sought refuge in towns and attempted to pass as freedmen. This tendency was a direct consequence of the growth of the freedman community during the early decades of the nineteenth century and its concentration in Bridgetown (Handler 1974:16-20, 59-65; cf. Heuman 1985:100, 104).

Maroons were often attracted to areas in Bridgetown where British military or naval personnel were concentrated. By the late eighteenth century and over subsequent years the area around St. Ann's garrison became a favored congregating place for, in the governor's words, "vagabond and runaway blacks."<sup>18</sup> The garrison, many of whose buildings are still standing and occupied (for civilian purposes) was constructed in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries to house British military forces, including black troops of the West India regiments. Indeed, the presence of these troops was probably the garrison's major attraction for Maroons (and some even may have been actually harbored by the soldiers). They could more readily blend with the slaves and freedmen catering to various needs, including sexual, of the military, and by the first few decades of the nineteenth century some may have also attempted to enlist in the West India regiments as freedmen (see Handler 1984). Whatever the case, it is not unusual to find newspaper advertisements reporting that a runaway was believed "to conceal himself in or about the barracks at St. Ann's castle" or had been spotted and "may be taken at ... St. Ann's"; these slaves even may have been actually harbored by soldiers.<sup>19</sup>

Wherever and however they successfully hid, Maroons continued to use the towns and attempted to pass as free. Even in the twilight of slavery slaveowners advertised, for example, for "a Negro man slave by name Andrew [who] absented himself ... he has represented himself ... as a free man when making for employ."<sup>20</sup> As late as 1833, the Barbados governor wrote the Colonial Office that

some anxiety exists here at the great number of runaways from the estates ... They now amount to between 4[00] and 500, but many of these have been absent two and three years, which shows the wretched state of the police as runaways almost always conceal themselves in towns.<sup>21</sup>

It seems surprising that so late in the slave period Maroons were able to elude capture, if the governor's figures can be believed, for as long as two or three years. It also appears that at this time the towns afforded the best chances for remaining free for long periods; long-term escapes in the

countryside probably would have been more difficult (but not impossible) because of limited natural refuge areas and the chance that unknown blacks in a district could have been more readily identified as runaways.

In earlier periods, when natural refuges were more plentiful and hiding places more difficult to discover, Maroons could remain at large for relatively long periods, sometimes, as Ligon (1657:105) reported in the late 1640s, "for many months together," in some cases perhaps for as much as a year or more. Long-term absences in earlier periods are also suggested by several laws. Observing that "diverse Negroes are and long since have been runaway into woods and other fastness of the island," the 1661 and 1688 slave acts enabled the raising of armed patrols to capture such Maroons "either alive or dead." For those captured alive after an absence of over six months a reward was offered; it was greater for the capture of those absent over one year.<sup>22</sup> Similarly, 1676 and 1692 laws seem to imply that slaves could often elude capture for more than a month; these laws mandate the death penalty for captured Maroons who had been living in Barbados for at least a year and who had been absent for a month or more.<sup>23</sup> Executions under the 1676 and 1692 acts occurred in the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries. It is impossible, however, to determine how often the 1692 act was invoked in later periods and how many slaves lost their lives under these laws; or how long the average Maroon at particular historical periods could expect to remain at large.

Occasional specific cases indicate the lengths of time that some could remain at large, and thus suggest the range of possibilities. In 1702, a slaveowner was financially compensated after the execution of his "Negro woman" who had been absent "for over a year,"<sup>24</sup> in the early 1780s a "Negro was lost for several weeks or months" until "met accidentally by the man whose business it was to take up runaway Negroes,"<sup>25</sup> and Higman (1984:390) cites a newspaper ad for a man who had been absent for about a year before his master advertised for his return in 1815. In fact, newspaper advertisements sometimes indicate relatively long absences when they report, for example, that (as of the date of an advertisement's appearance) a slave had been absent "for many years," "several months past," "for some time," and "some time ago."<sup>26</sup> Most advertisements do not specify the length of the absence, but information was collected on twenty-nine absentees: thirteen (45 percent) had been absent two weeks or less, but four (14 percent) had been missing from five to eight months and another four had been absent for one to two years; the remaining eight (27 percent) fell between one to four months.<sup>27</sup> It bears emphasizing that these periods mark absences from when the ads first appeared. It was common for ads to repeat themselves over several issues of a newspaper,

sometimes for several weeks or months, but it is unknown how long the advertised runaways were able to remain at large, or, indeed, if they were able to escape permanently: "they will run away," lamented a Barbados merchant in the late seventeenth century, "and perhaps be never seen more" (Littleton 1689:19-20).

Newton plantation's daily work logs for 24 months, 1796-98, show that five first- and second-gang slaves had been "absent" (the logs do not use the word "runaway") for periods ranging from two to thirty days, averaging ten days; at Seawell plantation, over a twenty-two-month period during the same years, another five slaves had been absent from one to twenty days, averaging 9.2.<sup>28</sup> A plantation owner complained to his manager that "James has been absent so long as four months ... [and] the boy Ned, who has been absent for several years ... must now be grown to a man."<sup>29</sup> In 1813 Newton's attorney recalled a case in the late 1790s when George "ran away and has never been heard of."<sup>30</sup> In one case, a reward was offered for the capture of Primus, a driver at Mount Wilton plantation. Three months earlier he had been sent, with a ten-day written absence permit, to search for another plantation slave, Prince, who had been absent for a long, but unspecified, period. Rather than return to the plantation, however, Primus absconded.<sup>31</sup> The ad implies a suspicion that both slaves were still in Barbados, but this is not certain. Both may have escaped the island completely as did other reported long-term absentees (see below). Heuman (1985:104) cites a few cases of long-term runaways who remained undetected in Barbados for many years. In one case, the slave had successfully passed as free for sixteen years; in another, the slave lived in the village of another plantation for at least twenty-five years; in a third case, an African-born man lived "six years in Barbados before being discovered as a slave." Heuman (1985:109) is probably correct in his assumption that sometimes owners made little effort to claim or recapture runaways because they no longer wanted slaves who may have been especially troublesome or whose labor was no longer valued; the elderly or the infirm, for example, were occasionally manumitted for the latter reasons (Handler 1974:34).

### MARITIME MARRONAGE

Higman (1984:388) has observed that Maroons "had greater chance of success in remaining free" if they could "enter urban situations" or "escape by boat." Boat escapes were fairly widespread in the Caribbean, and the late Jamaican historian Neville Hall coined the phrase "maritime



marronage” to refer to overseas escapes from the small islands of the Danish West Indies (cf. Beckles 1985:92n2). Some absentees who hid in Bridgetown and elsewhere in Barbados may have been actually awaiting opportunities for such “maritime marronage.” Indeed, it is likely that many absentees who attempted to hide in Barbados were in fact only seeking temporary refuge while awaiting an opportunity to escape the island, and the slave system, permanently.

Evidence occurs very early in Barbados’ history that white indentured servants escaped the island by sea (e.g., Colt 1925), indirectly suggesting the possibility and likelihood that slaves did the same. Servants continued escaping throughout the seventeenth century (Beckles 1985), but only later seventeenth- and eighteenth-century sources provide direct information that slaves also made their way to neighboring (often French-held) islands in stolen “shallops, boats, and other vessels”<sup>32</sup>; some may have had access to these vessels as fisherman or boatmen. Later periods also sometimes yield evidence of escaped fishermen, sailors, or boatmen whose stolen boats took them as far as the British Leeward islands.<sup>33</sup> In 1712 two Codrington slaves “went off in a sloop with a white man.” One of them, prompted by the desire to rejoin his wife and children, returned to Barbados in 1713; the other was reported to be “wandering ... somewhere in the Leeward Islands,” perhaps Antigua (Bennett 1958:26).

St. Vincent, a Carib Indian stronghold lying approximately 100 miles west of Barbados, was, by the 1660s (and probably earlier), a refuge for escaped slaves. In 1668 Barbados’ Governor Willoughby signed a treaty with several Carib chiefs. The treaty provided that the Indians were to return “Negroes formerly run away from Barbadoes” as well as those “as shall hereafter be fugitives from any English islands.”<sup>34</sup> In early 1676 St. Vincent may have contained about “600 escaped Negroes”<sup>35</sup> – “some run away from Barbadoes and elsewhere.”<sup>36</sup> Father Labat, a French priest, visited St. Vincent in 1700 and noted that in addition to Caribs the island also contained

a very great number of fugitive negroes, for the most part from Barbados, which, being to windward ... gives the runaways every possible facility for escaping from their masters’ plantations in boats or on piperies or rafts, and taking refuge among the savages. (Quoted in Taylor 1951:22)

There are indications that Barbadian slaves continued escaping to St. Vincent throughout the seventeenth century,<sup>37</sup> so increasing the number of so-called Black Caribs that Labat could observe that the

number of Negroes on St. Vincent has increased to such an extent, either by those born in the country or by those come from Barbados to join them, that it much surpasses that of the Caribs. (Quoted in Taylor 1951:22)

Some slaves may have fled to St. Vincent during the early eighteenth century, but the evidence (Douglass 1755, I:132) is ambiguous; however, there are indications that the island was a refuge for escapees in later periods (Heuman 1985:101).

Barbadian slaves also managed escape to other French-held islands, particularly Martinique and St. Lucia, approximately 140 miles and 100 miles, respectively, to the northwest.

The passage from Barbados to Martinique is short, and easily performed in small boats, whereby Negro slaves run away, are stolen by sailors or driven away in boats by stress of weather, etc.<sup>38</sup>

The Barbados Council sent the home government a "list of 31 Negroes ... stolen, runaway or driven by stress of weather from Barbados to Martinique in 1717, 1718."<sup>39</sup> Slaves "driven by stress of weather" were probably fishermen whose boats had been blown off course. In general, slaves who were kidnapped or who fled to the French islands during the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries were rarely returned to Barbados, "even in times of peace" between the British and French.<sup>40</sup>

Some slaves bound for Martinique and St. Lucia during this period were kidnapped by Frenchmen. In 1722, the Barbados Council president lamented the "disordered and ruinous state of this colony," illustrating Barbados' vulnerability by reporting how its inadequate military defenses could not prevent Frenchmen from landing at night and engaging in illicit trade; they also "steal and carry away our Negroes."<sup>41</sup> British smugglers also clandestinely traded with the French. In one case in 1725 "several boatloads of Negroes," surreptitiously boarded on a ship in Barbados, were ultimately sold in Dominica.<sup>42</sup> Newspaper advertisements occasionally indicate that Barbadian slaves who had been sold or taken abroad had escaped and were suspected of having returned to Barbados. Illustrative, but not unique, is the case of a man who had been sold to owners in Demerara. He absconded from his new owners who had "great reason to think he has returned to Barbados."<sup>43</sup> One can only speculate on the motivations for such returnees, but they probably had a great deal to do with family connections.

Some slaves who were illegally removed from Barbados may have been taken by physical force, or under its threat. Others (as well as indentured

servants in the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries) voluntarily agreed to clandestinely leave Barbados after having been enticed aboard ships by captains, agents, or other middlemen who offered them freedom or a better life elsewhere. To the extent to which slaves permitted themselves to be verbally enticed to voluntarily board ships, believing they were to gain freedom elsewhere, they can be considered Maroons. What ultimately happened to such slaves is largely unknown; most were probably sold into slavery while some may have escaped permanently and successfully passed as freedmen. This occurred from a very early date, and by 1651 and 1652, if not earlier, laws were passed "against the stealing away of Negroes from off this island" (Hall 1764:463, 465). "Divers wicked persons have lately attempted to steal away Negroes," observed the 1652 law, "by specious pretence of promising them freedom in another country." The law, in fact, not only prohibited the actual unauthorized removal of slaves, but also forbade anyone from attempting to "persuade any Negroes to leave their masters service ... with an intent to carry ... them out of this island" (Jennings 1654:47).

Clearly, slaves were escaping if the promise of freedom outside of Barbados provided an incentive to voluntarily board ships under, one must assume, secretive conditions and at considerable bodily risk. Regardless of their ultimate disposition and fate in other territories, when these slaves agreed to leave Barbados they probably assumed they were permanently escaping their masters and slavery.

Departing from Barbados with the illegal complicity and enticement of whites was an opportunity for slaves and a problem slaveowners confronted throughout the period of slavery. And the regularity of this practice is reflected in the laws designed to eliminate it. The earliest of these, as noted above, appears to have been passed in 1651 and 1652, but laws in 1661, 1688, 1700, 1706, and 1709, addressed the same "pernicious practice" by attempting to close loopholes in earlier laws and increasing the sanctions, particularly the fines, against violators.<sup>44</sup> Fines and other precautionary measures (such as requiring departing ship captains to swear an oath that they were not illegally removing any slaves) to the contrary notwithstanding, the surreptitious removal of slaves continued and apparently reached such large proportions that in 1727 the legislature decided to impose the ultimate sanction.

Stressing that trading ships, primarily from Martinique, had been anchoring at remote offshore points in Barbados expressly "to steal, force or entice ... slaves" (as well as white debtors and indentured servants) to leave the island, on August 8, 1727 the legislature clearly stated the gravity with which it (and slaveowners in general) viewed illegal removal:

it was made into a felony and the death penalty "without benefit of clergy" was to be imposed (Hall 1764:283, 492). This law was modified in 1753 (Hall 1764:369), when the continuing "clandestine" removal of slaves was again noted; the death penalty, however, remained, and, as far as can be established, stayed in effect until the end of the slave period. William Dickson (1814:451) later reported several cases wherein the death penalty was imposed (although in all cases it appears the accused were ultimately pardoned); yet, he notes, "the practice of smuggling away Negroes, in defiance of death and confiscation was perfectly notorious; ... and a lucrative trade it undoubtedly was."

Although hope for escape through illegal traders apparently continued into the nineteenth century, as time passed slaves also used other devices for boarding ships. One of these was made possible by the relatively large numbers of tradesmen and other skilled slaves hired out by their owners; such slaves had relative freedom of movement, particularly in towns. One such person was William, a "mulatto man, about 27 years old," who had escaped from Barbados and was still at large over a year after his escape; he was "seen in St. Lucia shortly after he absented himself, and intimated he was allowed his time to work for the purchase of his freedom."<sup>45</sup> Another method, which became feasible with the growth of the freedman population by the late eighteenth century (Handler 1974:12-28), involved fraudulently claiming to be free while negotiating passage with a ship captain. This method is illustrated by an incident that occurred during the summer of 1802, as summarized by Governor Seaforth.<sup>46</sup> A British naval vessel bound for Martinique had briefly anchored at Barbados; before leaving it was going to take a few "Negro lads" aboard. The captain was ultimately accused of planning to entice the slaves with offers of money, clothes, and jobs as stewards. In his defense, the captain asserted that when he came ashore to dine he was approached by the slaves who claimed they were free and offered their services as stewards. Whatever actually happened, the captain clearly gave what he believed was a legitimate defense, that is, the slaves had duped him into believing they were free.<sup>47</sup> A similar incident may have occurred in the following year.

Other slaves who gained shipboard passage not only may have pretended to be free, but also may have purchased passage with money they accumulated through such activities as being hired out or marketing. Others may have bribed ship captains while freely admitting their slave status. In whatever way slaves made it on board ships, and whatever motivated captains (or other crew members) to assist them and risk serious legal penalties, escape from Barbados continued to occur during the late

eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries – the overwhelming majority of the escapees being men (Heuman 1985:101).

The continuing concern of slaveholders that their slaves might flee the island is well reflected in newspaper advertisements. These regularly warned ship captains or others that they would be prosecuted if they removed slaves from Barbados; advertisements also explicitly record suspicions that runaways might be preparing to leave. One owner, for example, believed that a young woman was hidden by her father, possibly a freedman, who the owner suspected “is using his endeavors to get her off the island”; another owner opined that an absent African “no doubt will try to get to one of the neighbouring islands”<sup>48</sup>; a third advertised for an elderly woman and her daughter, and cautioned “all masters of vessels ... not to take them from the island, as the law will be rigidly enforced against them.”<sup>49</sup>

Though surely atypical in its details, the case of John Thomas illustrates a successful escapee. Thomas, a “mulatto,” was a carpenter at Newton plantation, where he was born and had a large family. In 1808 or 1809, when in his late twenties, he gained passage (by unknown means) on a ship bound for several Caribbean islands. For three or four years Thomas lived abroad (probably passing as free), and in 1813 boarded a ship in Grenada bound for England – where he arrived in the summer of that year. Somehow Thomas located Newton’s absentee owner. He complained of the unfair treatment that he had received from Newton’s manager and stated his desire to return to Barbados on the “promise of indemnity and no stripes.” The plantation attorney in Barbados, a prominent planter himself, was livid when he learned of Thomas’s presence in England. He gave his version of why Thomas escaped and added in his letter to the owner:

I wish to heaven you could get out of this fellow how he escaped from the country and by whom he was conveyed from the island; nothing would give me more pleasure than to punish the captain of the vessel. These are things which are constantly occurring. I have three slaves absent from me in the same way.<sup>50</sup>

In his anger and statement concerning his own absentees, the attorney probably reflected widespread feelings among slaveowners. Although there is no way of establishing how many slaves escaped Barbados or successfully hid on the island during this period (and earlier) their numbers were clearly sufficient to irritate, anger, and frustrate the authorities and slaveowners. A major expression of these sentiments and concern with Maroons in general was the legislative and other attention devoted over the years to their capture, confinement, and punishment.

## CAPTURE, CONFINEMENT, AND PUNISHMENT

Slaveowners sometimes dispatched “slaves in whom they place confidence” to hunt down Maroons, wrote William Dickson (1814:433) in the late eighteenth century.<sup>51</sup> When, for example, two newly purchased Africans “fled to Bridgetown” from the Codrington plantations in 1746, “seasoned Negroes went in search of them” (Bennett 1958:49). Newspaper advertisements suggest that this practice was not uncommon in Barbados in general. In the case of Primus, the driver at Mount Wilton plantation, cited above, this “confidence” was misplaced. Mingo was an apparently habitual absentee; if questioned in locales where he was not known, he explained his presence “by saying he is sent out in search of runaways” and “appears publicly in the character of a runaway catcher.”<sup>52</sup> Several laws attempted to encourage slaves to assist in capturing runaways. In 1661 they were offered a currency reward for capturing absentees of more than a year; although this provision, among others, was inexplicably repealed in 1688, in 1826 a reward was again offered as “due encouragement” to slaves who captured runaways or informed against those “who shall harbour or conceal any runaway.”<sup>53</sup> The impact of these laws or the extent to which slaves themselves hunted and captured Maroons is unknown, but the sources convey the impression that whites were primarily involved, especially in the earlier historical periods.

Seventeenth-century laws ordered plantation overseers and owners to regularly search slave houses for “fugitive and runaway Negroes.”<sup>54</sup> Although these requirements were not repealed until 1826, they were probably not regularly followed by plantation managements – beyond short periods in the seventeenth century after the discovery of revolt conspiracies; there is no information, however, if house searches resulted in the capture of any Maroons.

In the seventeenth century armed patrols of whites appear to have been the most frequent way that Maroons were hunted and captured. Sometimes these patrols were formed from militia units in the area where Maroons were suspected of hiding; at other times special warrants or orders were issued permitting individuals to raise armed posses to search for “such Negroes [who] stand forth in rebellion.”<sup>55</sup>

Raising patrols of “up to 20 armed men” to seek Maroons was probably first codified in 1661; the provision was repeated in 1688. A similar authorization, limiting patrols to ten men, was continued in 1731, and this persisted until 1826 when up to twenty men was reintroduced.<sup>56</sup> However, although formally organized armed groups occasionally tracked Maroons in later periods,<sup>57</sup> such patrols were less common as Maroon

bands disappeared. For most of the slave period, individuals or small groups, acting on an ad hoc basis, seem to have been responsible for the capture of most runaways. These individuals were probably largely motivated by the prospect of monetary rewards.

The earliest laws concerning runaways specified monetary rewards for the capture of "Negro's that wander and run from their masters plantation" (e.g., Jennings 1654:43-45, 81-83, 146-48). The reward amounts and details of their allocation were modified over the years, but rewards were fundamental to the system of runaway arrest. Legally-specified rewards were paid by the public treasury (which was later reimbursed by the slaveowner) to capturers who turned runaways over to the provost marshal while the slaveowner himself paid a reward if a runaway was returned directly to him.<sup>58</sup> Newspaper advertisements regularly offered rewards, sometimes specifying the amounts, sometimes merely offering a "handsome reward." The latter phrase as well as specific sums also occurs in plantation documents.<sup>59</sup>

In early years white servants may have been required, as "part of their work description as defined by their masters," Beckles (1985:85) writes, to hunt Maroons, while "ex-servants were paid a fee" for this service. Beckles (1985:85) relates an incident in the 1680s of a former servant who continued as a wage laborer for his ex-master and whose job involved hunting runaway servants and slaves – "eventually he suffered the loss of an arm from a blow administered by a runaway slave"; during the same period another servant also "lost an arm pursuing a runaway slave." Since slaves (and freedmen) were virtually unprotected against whites, free blacks and slaves on their masters' authorized business could be erroneously identified as Maroons by overzealous whites eager for a reward (cf. Pinckard 1806, I:396-99). The frequency of marronage and the reward system ultimately stimulated some whites to become bounty hunters whose livelihood depended to some degree on capturing Maroons. Referred to variously as "runaway-catchers," "Negro-catchers," and "Negro-hunters," these people were "detested by the Negroes," and, consequently, according to Dickson (1789:94), "do not often go out at nights unarmed" for fear of being attacked; in fact Dickson (1814:359-61) described an incident wherein a "a white Negro-hunter ... in my neighborhood, got a severe beating from a runaway." The existence of bounty hunters in the later periods is further attested in a letter from Barbados' deputy provost marshal: figures on the number of captured runaways were unavailable, he reported to a colonial official in 1826, because "they are taken up, not only by constables, *but other persons promiscuously, who are employed for that service*, and in many instances are carried

home to their owners for the proffered reward,” rather than being taken to the provost marshal (emphasis supplied).<sup>60</sup>

By the early 1650s Barbados' legal apparatus defined, albeit briefly, the provost marshal's office as playing a central role in the process by which runaways were arrested, confined, and claimed by their owners.<sup>61</sup> The details of this process became more elaborate over the years as laws relating to runaways were periodically modified. The essential features of the provost marshal's role, however, established in the second half of the seventeenth century, endured until the end of the slave period.

Briefly, a captured runaway, not directly returned to his owner, was to be delivered to the provost marshal who was charged with confining the slave and providing him “with sufficient food and drink” until claimed by his owner. Before the slave was discharged, the owner had to reimburse the public treasury for the reward it paid to the capturer, and then pay the provost marshal a per diem (as well as a general fee in later times) for each day the slave was in custody. The provost marshal was responsible for financially compensating a slaveowner should his slave die in custody for lack of food or should he escape; in such cases, he was also required to reimburse the treasury for the reward it had allocated. The provost marshal was to hold the slave for a certain period; if unclaimed the slave was to be sold at public auction, the proceeds going to meet expenses and the surplus into the public treasury.

Until claimed, arrested slaves were placed in the “cage,” a “small, low, dirty-looking building, with grated doors and windows” – as described by an American in 1814 (Browne 1926:79), also called the “slave prison.” The cage was distinguished from the “common gaol” and was specifically constructed for Maroons. By the 1650s a cage had been established in Bridgetown (Jennings 1654:43-45; Shilstone 1933), and by the middle of the eighteenth century, and probably much earlier, smaller cages also existed in the other towns. “The cages in the towns,” wrote Dickson (1789:137-38), are “so called from their fronts being composed of open frames of hard timber. In those miserable receptacles, which, next to the plantation dungeons, are the most lively emblems of slavery, runaways are confined in irons or in stocks.”

It seems that runaways were only very temporarily housed in the cages of the other towns; from these cages they were transferred to Bridgetown, site of the principal cage.<sup>62</sup> For many years the Bridgetown cage was centrally located, fronting Broad Street, the capital's main thoroughfare (Shilstone 1933). Maintained by the government and periodically inspected by legislative committees,<sup>63</sup> the cage was repaired and enlarged over the years, but always remained, even by the standards of the period, dingy,



cramped, and unsanitary. By the early nineteenth century, Bridgetown's white merchants and residents considered it "a common nuisance" and in September 1817 they petitioned for the construction of a new cage that would be located away from Bridgetown's "most populous street." The petitioners described the existing cage as very "narrow and confined," lacking side or rear openings permitting cross ventilation, filthy, and disease-ridden; they also found it "odorous" and noisy throughout the day and night. A few months later the legislature ordered the construction of a new cage away from the city streets.<sup>64</sup>

Whites viewed marronage gravely and "the longer and oftener a slave deserts," observed Dickson (1814:440), "the more severe is his treatment when caught." Punishments specified in the laws included public execution for repeated offenders (and certain long-term escapees), branding, and severe whipping. (In addition, if in resisting arrest a slave struck, attempted to strike, or killed a white he was subject to the death penalty, which governed slave felonies in general since the mid-1600s.) Also, slavemasters had considerable latitude in inflicting the punishments they considered appropriate. The whip was regularly used. Although the maximum number of lashes for particular offenses varied in the laws, there is no indication that slavemasters felt legally or otherwise constrained or that such laws were enforced to any great extent.<sup>65</sup> Joseph Senhouse, an Englishman whose family had plantation interests in Barbados, reported a case in the late 1770s wherein a plantation slave

being threaten'd with a severe punishment for absenting himself ... threw himself head long into a copper full of boiling cane liquor & was instantly scalded to death. Several instances of the like shocking nature has been known in this island.

Senhouse also indicated another punishment, or, at any rate, what the slavemaster believed to be a punishment based on his understanding of the slaves' conception of the afterlife. One day Senhouse observed at a neighboring plantation the "head of a Negroe stuck upon a pole close to the road side." He learned that this slave had frequently absconded; "as soon as he died [the cause of death is not reported], his head was fix there." The slavemaster believed this action would deter marronage because slaves, after death, would not want to return to Africa "without a head"; "there are three other horrid spectacles of the like nature at this time on the above plantation," Senhouse wrote in his diary, "having all been guilty of the same offence" (Senhouse 1986-88:181-2, 186-7).

Certain common disciplinary measures were not legally codified but

became well established in custom. After ordering a whipping, for example, slavemasters, from an early period and for many years afterward (and following a widespread practice in New World slave societies), often placed iron collars with long projecting spikes on the necks of captured Maroons and/or fettered their legs with iron chains, “the better to distinguish them.”<sup>66</sup> Dickson (1789:15-16), generalizing on the 1770s and early 1780s, wrote that “common punishments inflicted on runaways” on Barbadian plantations were “whipping, confinement in the [plantation] dungeon, fetters or stocks”; in addition,

some few work with a chain fastened round both ancles which, from its length, they are obliged to tuck up to enable them to walk; others have a chain locked, or an iron collar with projecting prongs, riveted, round the neck; others a boot, or ring of broad bar-iron hammered round one ancle; and those whose labour is nearly stationary are chained to a 56 lb. weight, or a log of wood. (Dickson 1789:122)

The 1826 “slave consolidation act” for the first time prohibited placing “any metal collar round the neck” or “chains, weights, or irons of any kind on the body or limbs”; however, slaveowners could still keep “refractory and disorderly slaves, or such as are addicted to runaway, in iron or wooden stocks, or secure places of confinement.”<sup>67</sup>

In general, the severity and intensity of punishments varied with the inclination and policies of particular slavemasters, the frequency of the individual slave’s offense, and the customs and mores of the historical period. Extreme and sadistic punishments and excesses of violence probably abated by the final decades of the slave period. By the early nineteenth century, newspaper advertisements commonly assured runaways of a full pardon if they returned of their own will. The reforms of the age are also reflected in (though, of course, not demonstrated by) the “slave consolidation act” and the great length to which it specified the nature, conditions, and limits of the punishments slaves should receive. For the first time a law imposed fines for committing “wanton acts of cruelty” (such as excessive flogging), defined flogging procedures and the type of whip to be used, and invoked sanctions against those who “maim, mutilate, or dismember” slaves. In addition the act repealed a provision first enacted in 1661 and then renewed in 1688, viz. if a slave died because of punishment given by his master or his master’s agent for running away or any other crime, no one was to be held legally responsible.<sup>68</sup> Yet, considering the approximately two centuries of the slave period, there is no evidence that captured Maroons received anything but harsh physical punishment, even judged by the standards of the day. Those who fled

always risked serious bodily harm as well as severe mental anguish; even death sometimes resulted.<sup>69</sup>

## CONCLUSIONS

The potential and actual severity of sanctions combined with Barbados' geographic and demographic features probably inhibited many slaves from escaping, and affected the nature of slave flight. Despite the constraints of a relatively numerous white population,<sup>70</sup> an organized militia, repressive laws, and changes in ecological conditions slaves continuously absconded from their masters. In the more mountainous islands of the Caribbean Maroon groups could hope to remain as independent settlements "with hopes of remaining undisturbed by slaveowners" (Higman 1984:390), but aside from the seventeenth century, when Barbados was heavily wooded, Maroons could not hope for such permanent escape on the island. Yet, from the early Maroon groups in the forested interior to the hundreds of runaways in Bridgetown and the thirty-two Maroon captives in jail in 1833,<sup>71</sup> slave flight, in one form or another, was clearly an enduring element of Barbadian slave society from the seventeenth century to emancipation. In fact, in estimating the annual number of "clear working days" of plantation slaves (other than domestics), the knowledgeable William Dickson (1814:433) believed that an average of nineteen days were lost to plantation labor "for runaways and their pursuers." His estimate suggests the extent to which unauthorized absences or marronage occurred during the late eighteenth century.

The few available individual plantation records confirm that unauthorized absence was not uncommon (although the data cannot distinguish between slaves who aimed at permanent freedom and those with temporary goals). For example, in 1756 there were 128 slaves at Lowther plantation, and rewards were paid for at least ten captured runaways during that year; for twenty-two to twenty-four months during 1796-98 about the same number had been absent from Newton (with about 255 slaves) and Seawell (with about 182), and for most of the eighteenth century, the Codrington plantations, whose slave population averaged about 250, annually disbursed "about six or seven" reward fees for the return of fugitives; in 1725, for example, "not fewer than six" slaves were missing at one time.<sup>72</sup> If only slaves in their twenties and early thirties, the age group most prone to escape (see Appendix), were to be calculated, the proportion of plantation runaways who were prime laborers would be much higher.

However, considering the duration of the slave period (and its various phases), no data exist on the numbers of slaves who absconded and who were never captured (including permanent escapees from the island), how many successfully eluded capture for appreciable lengths of time, or simply how many were defined as runaways. As late as 1825, during a period when authorities placed greater emphasis than in earlier years on collecting numerical data on slaves, the Barbados provost marshal could not provide the British colonial office with figures on the total number of arrested runaways.<sup>73</sup> In brief, there are no data on the number of Maroons and what proportion of the slave population they represented, although estimates for the early nineteenth century suggest a lower rate of flight in Barbados and other older British Caribbean sugar colonies (e.g., Antigua, St. Kitts), perhaps related to the smaller numbers of Africans in their wider slave populations at this time (Higman 1984:387; cf. Morgan & Nicholls 1998:15).

Barbadian Maroons undoubtedly were not as numerous as those in Jamaica,<sup>74</sup> but they were still sufficiently abundant to keep the issue alive among slaveholders in general, and to be particularly bothersome to planters in particular. As in the Caribbean in general, slaves who were "firmly determined to escape" were apparently not deterred by the severity of the punishments they could incur (Higman 1984:393).

Over the duration of the slave period, many slaves identified by whites as runaways may have had long-term goals of permanent freedom. Others may have actually considered themselves temporary absentees and lacked any intention or hope of permanent escape; rather they had short term goals such as escaping punishment or temporary relief from an oppressive master, or visiting a close kinsman, friend, or lover on another plantation. Close kin such as parents and children were frequently dispersed in different areas of Barbados. Evidence discussed earlier indicates that slaves made efforts to maintain these relationships through physical contact despite the risks involved. Moreover, slaves often had sexual relationships with slaves on other plantations, and temporary absences could have resulted from efforts to pursue these relationships. The most common pattern involved a man who left his plantation on an evening after work and travelled elsewhere to spend the night with his "wife." In most cases efforts were probably made to return to one's plantation by the following morning, although sometimes, as a well-known planter reported, "returning from a distant connection in order, without sleep, to be in due time to go through a hard day's labour" may have resulted in the slave's decision to stay longer; thus, he might have been considered a Maroon and disciplined accordingly.<sup>75</sup> Primary sources usually prevent distinguishing

between permanent and temporary motivations and goals, and preclude determining if slaves who whites considered as Maroons actually viewed themselves as permanent escapees or as temporary absentees.

In fact, in most cases the available information only permits conjecture as to the reasons why slaves absconded. For those who hoped for permanent escape, their grievances were almost certainly directed at particular masters and situations (rather than at an amorphously defined slave system), and probably included such broad dissatisfactions as inadequate food supplies, excessive labor demands and conditions, and harsh disciplinary measures or severe physical abuse.<sup>76</sup> Such conditions probably formed the background context within which particular incidents occurred that finally provoked the slave to flee. In 1780 or 1781, for example, a slave escaped "for some crime he had committed, having been turned out of his hut which his family had lived in many years"<sup>77</sup>; Caesar fled in 1819 because, as his master phrased it, "his refractory and apparent rebellious conduct ... occasioned his being in confinement, from which he escaped."<sup>78</sup> Other slaves, as indicated above, may have run to be with family elsewhere or as a reaction against being sold and removed from family to a distant plantation or even off the island.<sup>79</sup>

Although one can never be sure of the specific motivations that caused most slaves to become Maroons or absentees, it is clear that unauthorized absenteeism was a source of considerable frustration and anger to slave-masters and the plantocracy in general. Moreover, regardless of why particular individuals absconded and what they ultimately hoped to achieve, slaves were making a choice and, in so doing – regardless of the consequences – they regained a modicum of control over their lives. Slave flight was thus a characteristic feature of Barbadian slave society and to uncritically assume or categorically assert that Barbados' slaves "could not run away" because the island was so small (Greenfield 1966:53) or that maronage did not exist because the island's geography was quite unlike such places as Hispaniola or Jamaica not only distorts the historical record but also glosses over an important dimension of slave resistance and behavior.

#### APPENDIX: DEMOGRAPHIC CHARACTERISTICS OF MAROONS

Narrative sources fail to generalize on the demographic characteristics of Barbadian Maroons, but two independently derived samples provide some idea. As a by-product of my continuing research on slave life in Barbados since the mid-1960s, I randomly collected information on 167 runaways

from 1735 to 1824 (see Table 1), but make no claim for the statistical representativeness of this “sample of convenience.” Gad Heuman (1985) more systematically collected information on 368 runaways from advertisements in the *Barbados Mercury* and *The Barbadian* newspapers for the years 1805, 1810, 1815, 1819, 1824, and 1830. Heuman calculated distributions of variables as well as correlations among variables – the

Table 1. Characteristics of Barbados Maroons, 1735-1824

Characteristic	Occurrences/n	Percentage
<b>Sex</b>		
Male	112/185	61
Female	73/185	39
<b>Age Group</b>		
Man	94/173	54
Woman	54/173	31
Boy	10/173	6
Girl	15/173	9
<b>Phenotype</b>		
Black	126/145	87
Mulatto	19/145	13
<b>Occupation</b>		
Skilled, semi-skilled	34/43	79
Non-agricultural	8/43	19
Plantation field	1/43	2
<b>Origin</b>		
African	15/167	9
Creole	152/167	91
<b>Place of Residence</b>		
Town	29/84	35
Country	55/84	65
<b>Cases by Period</b>		
1735-1789	82/185	44
1801-1813	46/185	25
1816-1824	57/185	31

Sources: *Barbados Gazette* April 30, 1735, November 29, 1752, May 22, 30, 1753, December 19, 1761; *Barbados Mercury* April 1783-December 1784, July 1787-June 1788, April 1, June 17, 1789; *Barbados Mercury and Bridgetown Gazette* January-February 1805, January 10, 17, 24, 27, February 14, September 16, 1807, November 5, 8, 12, 1808, January-March 1816, August 30, 1817, January-March, October-December 1819, October-December 1824; *The Barbadian* (January-March, October-December 1824; SRO, Seaforth Papers, GD 46/7/7, F. Seaforth to E. Nepean, July 20, 1802 and Captain Hardy, July 7, 1803; West India Committee Library, Alleyne Letters, J.F. Alleyne to Benjamin Storey, September 24, 1801; ULL, Newton Papers 523/703, Blackman to T. Lane, August 18, 1813.

latter was not accomplished with my data – but also confronted the same problems that I did of sketchiness and incompleteness of information. There is some overlap between the sources used for the present paper and Heuman's time periods and sources, but the overlap is not great. Moreover, although Heuman's sample is much larger, it is confined to the nineteenth century while 44 percent of my cases are from the eighteenth. Heuman does not numerically break down all of the characteristics he discusses so that his data cannot be entirely presented in terms comparable to my Table. Nevertheless, these two independently-derived sets of findings, complemented by some nineteenth-century statistical materials published by Higman (1984:386-93), conveniently cross check each other and provide a firmer picture of Barbadian Maroons.

Both samples agree that males predominated, 60 percent in my sample and 63 in Heuman's (1985:98; Table 1). Males constituted about 46 to 48 percent of Barbados' wider slave population (Handler & Lange 1978:36, 67-68; Higman 1984:413). An imbalance of males over females was characteristic of other British mainland and Caribbean colonies (Higman 1984:389; Morgan & Nicholls 1998:19-20). Although Barbados conforms to the general pattern, the island's male-female ratio is lower than in other areas (cf. Morgan & Nicholls 1998:19-20, Tables 1-3), and indicates a larger proportion of female Maroons than elsewhere in British America (cf. Morgan & Nicholls 1998). Higman (1984:389) provides evidence for 1817 that although males were more numerous among Maroons in the plantation areas, females predominated in Bridgetown; he suggests that females "were more likely to work in occupations that had a potential for filtering into freedman society." Thus, the higher proportion of females may be, at least partially, explained by the preponderance of females in the wider slave population as well as the importance of Bridgetown and its opportunities (as limited as they were) for females as, for example, domestic servants, hawkers, or even prostitutes (Handler 1974:125-38; 1981).

The Barbados sources rarely give absolute ages, but slaveowner estimates for about twenty Maroons in my sample indicates that men were almost entirely in their twenties and early-to-mid thirties. Heuman found that "nearly three-fourths of all runways" were "under 30 years of age" (1985:98). Both samples are consistent with British Caribbean Maroons in general during the early nineteenth century: "young adults predominated, the mean age for creoles being about 30 years" (Higman 1984:389).

The sources rarely specify area of birth, but it is safe to assume that most Maroons during the period of both samples were Creoles – as was the wider Barbadian slave population during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries (Handler & Lange 1978:29). Only 9 percent in both

samples are identified as African (Heuman 1985:98) suggesting that Africans, in the later periods at least, did not abscond to any greater extent than Creoles.<sup>80</sup> In the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, when Africans were more numerous among Barbadian slaves, they were more prominent among Maroons.<sup>81</sup>

The place of residence from which most (65 percent) runaways in my sample absconded was a plantation, or a parish that is not St. Michael, Bridgetown's parish, indicating that most came from rural areas even though they may have hidden in the towns, particularly Bridgetown.

Both samples generally agree on occupation. Slaveowners were likely to mention a skill in their advertisements because it was an important descriptive identifier, and Heuman's (1985:99) analysis of ninety-two occupations showed that the "overwhelming number were skilled or semi-skilled." In my sample, occupation was specified for only forty-three runaways, and they also were mostly (79 percent) skilled or semi-skilled non-agricultural workers such as craftsmen or tradesmen (e.g., carpenter, blacksmith, mason), tailors, fishermen, shoemakers, cooks, a barber, and a butcher; the sample contains one person identified as a plantation driver. A second category (19 percent) comprises such non-agricultural jobs as porters, boatmen, domestics, and a huckster. Only one person in my sample is specifically identified as an agricultural field laborer, and field slaves also formed a small minority ("less than 5 percent") in Heuman's sample (1985:99). Although an occupational designation is lacking for the majority of runaways in both samples, agricultural laborers, i.e. members of the first and second gangs, were probably more numerous in absolute terms than the sample indicates since they formed the vast majority of Barbados' slave population. Nevertheless, both samples generally agree and suggest that skilled or semi-skilled workers of one kind or another absconded at a disproportionately higher rate than agricultural field workers (cf. Heuman 1985:97, 99).

The biggest and most visible discrepancy between the two samples is in the phenotype or "color" of the runaways. In Heuman's sample about 53 percent were "coloured" while only 13 percent were in mine. My sample suggests that mulattoes were *not* disproportionately represented while Heuman's sample forces an opposite conclusion (Heuman 1985:98). Until 1817, there were no statistics on the number of *slave* mulattoes in Barbados, but in that year, when mulattoes undoubtedly were more numerous than in earlier periods, they constituted only 15 percent of the island's slaves (Handler & Pohlmann 1984; Higman 1984:116). The discrepancy between the samples might reflect differences in the occupational data available to both samples. Heuman acquired occupational



information on a greater number of slaves, and there tended to be more "coloured" slaves among the occupational categories that constituted a larger percentage of the runaways (Heuman 1985:100). Another reason may relate to the fact that 44 percent of my total sample derives from the eighteenth century, a period when fewer mulatto slaves were in Barbados' wider slave population.

In brief, it appears that the typical or most numerous type of Maroon during the late eighteenth century and early nineteenth was a Creole black male in his twenties or early thirties who absconded from a plantation or rural area. Perhaps "colored" or mulatto slaves were disproportionately represented by the later decades of the slave period. During the period of both samples, most, probably the great majority, of Maroons absconded alone, not in groups, although pairs, e.g., parent-child, friends, occasionally occurred; group flight was probably more characteristic of African Maroons in the seventeenth century (cf. Morgan & Nicholls 1998:21). Many Maroons were skilled or semi-skilled, but since occupational data are lacking for most individuals in both samples, field slaves, who constituted the numerical majority of Barbadian slaves, probably absconded in greater numbers than the sources directly indicate. Despite the limitations of the Barbados samples, in broad age, sex, and, perhaps, occupational and phenotypic characteristics, Barbadian Maroons seem to conform to those in other areas of British America during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries (Higman 1984:386-93; Johnson 1981; Morgan 1985; Morgan & Nicholls 1998).

## NOTES

1. The first version of this paper was presented in November 1983 at a Department of History seminar at the University of the West Indies, Cave Hill, Barbados; it was reproduced and distributed as "Seminar Paper No. 3: 1983-84." Considerably revised versions were presented in November 1995 at the Institute of Early American History and Culture, Williamsburg, Virginia, and in November 1996 at the Carter G. Woodson Institute, University of Virginia. The present paper was prepared while I was a Fellow-in-Residence at the Virginia Foundation for the Humanities and Public Policy, Charlottesville. For their comments on various drafts I am grateful to Douglas Chambers, Ronald Hoffman, Michael McGiffert, Woodville Marshall, Samuel Martinez, George Mentore, Joseph Miller, Sidney Mintz, Cornelia Sears, and Frederika Teute. This version of the paper has also benefited greatly from the comments of Kenneth Bilby and Philip Morgan.

2. See Hall (1764:460-67) for titles of acts relating to runaways passed between 1646 and 1655; for texts of pre-1653 acts, see Jennings (1654:20-21, 43-45, 81-83, 146-48). Laws of 1661, 1676, 1688, and 1692 reflect major concerns with runaways;

similarly the titles of 1673 and 1701 obsolete or repealed laws (Public Record Office [PRO], Colonial Office Papers [CO] 30/2, Barbados Assembly and Council, An Act for the Better Ordering and Governing of Negroes, September 27, 1661, pp. 16-26 and A Supplemental Act to a Former Act for the Better Ordering and Governing of Negroes, April 21, 1676, pp. 114-25; Hall 1764:112-21, 130-31, 478, 492). Primary manuscript and printed sources are described in Handler 1971 and 1991.

3. Escapes by servants, not infrequently off the island, were also major problems for masters during the seventeenth century, and early laws dealing with runaways often applied to both servants and slaves. Moreover, there were similarities between slave and servant escape behavior during this period, and occasionally members of each group helped the other to flee (e.g., Beckles 1985).

4. "An act for the better ordering and governing of Negroes" (PRO, CO 30/2, Barbados Assembly and Council, September 27, 1661) exists only in manuscript and was one of the earliest attempts at a comprehensive slave law. "An act concerning Negroes," passed on August 30, 1644 and later repealed (Hall 1764:450), was probably an earlier effort to systematically regulate and control slave life and status. The 1644 law probably also dealt with runaways, but there is no known copy, printed or manuscript. The earliest manuscript laws in the Public Record Office (London) commence in 1645, and the 1644 act is not published in early editions of Barbados' laws (Jennings 1654, 1656; Rawlin 1699).

5. House of Commons (HofC), London, Sessional *Papers, Parliamentary Papers (PP)* 25 (1826-27), Barbados Assembly and Council, 1826. An Act to Repeal Several Acts and Clauses of Acts Respecting Slaves, and for Consolidating and Bringing into One Act, the Several Laws Relating thereto, In Explanation of the Measures Adopted ... for the Melioration of the Condition of the Slave Population in ... the West Indies, pp. 205-30; Handler 1974:97-98.

6. About forty to fifty acres of the native forest still exists today at Turners Hall in the Scotland District, Barbados' sole highland area, comprising about one seventh of the island's surface.

7. Slaves probably used magic to fortify themselves and insure their security. During the 1670s, an Anglican minister observed that they place "confidence in certain figures ... the fugitives and runaways believing these dieties able to protect them in their flight, and from discovery" (Godwyn 1680:33). Although no other direct historical evidence exists that protective charms were used, their presence is likely. Magic was pervasive in early slave life and commonly functioned, as in Africa, in anxiety-provoking situations; moreover, charms were ubiquitous in West Africa (e.g., Handler 1997a, 1997b).

8. PRO, CO 30/2, Barbados Assembly and Council, An Act ... Negroes, September 27, 1661; A Supplemental Act ... Negroes, April 21, 1676.

9. PRO, Barbados Council 1654-58, Minutes, February 1654-December 1658. 2 vols. Typescript.

10. PRO, CO 30/2, Barbados Assembly and Council An Act ... Negroes, September 27, 1661. Essentially the same phrasing is repeated in 1688, see Hall 1764:120.

11. The road still exists and is frequently travelled; it passes by Welchman Hall gully, a noted tourist attraction with abundant flora.
12. HofC, *PP*, Barbados Assembly and Council, 1826, An Act to Repeal Several Acts and Clauses of Acts Respecting Slaves, clause 12.
13. Society for the Propagation of the Gospel Archives, London, Letter Books, Series A, vol. 26, W. Johnson to Secretary of the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel, January 14, p. 381.
14. *Barbados Mercury*, February 13, 1819.
15. E.g., *Barbados Chronicle or Caribbean Courier*, March 16-19, 1808; *Barbados Mercury*, May 31, 1783; August 28, 1784; January 1, February 2, 1787; January-December, 1808-1809; February 10, October 2, 1824; *The Barbadian*, March 16, 1824.
16. Handler 1974:146-47; Heuman 1985:107; cf. *Barbados Chronicle or Caribbean Courier*, March 12-16, 1808 for a specific case. Heuman (1985:108) also found that whites sometimes harbored runaways; from this practice he infers that whites "may have often hired runaways," or, "alternatively, that escaped slaves may have sought particular whites as employers."
17. *Barbados Mercury*, January 24, 1807.
18. Scottish Record Office (SRO), Edinburgh, Seaforth Papers, GD 46/7/7, Francis Seaforth to E. Nepean, July 20, 1802.
19. *Barbados Mercury*, April 9, 1805, February 16, 1816; cf. *Barbados Mercury*, October 11, 25, and November 22, 1783; cf. Heuman 1985:107-8.
20. *The Barbadian*, March 15, 1831.
21. PRO, CO 28/11, Lionel Smith to Stanley, October 29, 1833; cf. Boston Public Library, Ms. U. 1.2., John B. Colthurst, Journal as a Special Magistrate in the Islands of Barbados and Saint Vincent, July 1835-August 1838. Until the close of the eighteenth century, there were very few freedmen, but their population grew from approximately 2,200 in 1801 to over 3,000 in 1815; by emancipation in 1833-34 there were around 6,500. Most freedmen lived in St. Michael and were concentrated in Bridgetown rather than the rural parts of the parish, although no separate town figures are available (Handler 1974:16-20). Other Maroons did not attempt to pass as free, but simply hoped to blend anonymously with Bridgetown's wider slave population. Aside for figures for 1679-80 (Dunn 1969:9), the number of Bridgetown's slaves for much of the period of slavery is unknown. However, in 1817 the town had around 9,280 slaves and in 1834, slaves numbered about 8,500; among British Caribbean towns, only Kingston, Jamaica, had a larger number of slaves (Higman 1984:94, table 4.4).
22. PRO, CO 30/2, Barbados Assembly and Council, An Act ... Negroes, September 27, 1661; CO 1/22, no. 55, A Treaty between His Excellency William Lord Willoughby ... and Several Chief Captains of the Island of St. Vincent, March 23, 1668; Hall 1764:120. The 1661 act also offered a reward to slaves who voluntarily captured absentees of more than one year; this provision was not renewed in the 1688 slave act.

23. PRO, CO 30/2, Barbados Assembly and Council, A Supplemental Act ... Negroes, April 21, 1676; Hall 1764:130-31. Initially passed in 1676, the death penalty was inadvertently repealed in 1688. After the discovery of a large-scale revolt conspiracy, however, and because slaves continued to abscond "and by their long absence ... become desperate, and daily plot and commit felonies and other enormities" the provision was renewed in 1692 and not repealed until 1819 (Hall 1764:130-31; Dwarris 1827:13; cf. Handler 1982).

24. PRO, *Calendar of State Papers, Colonial Series, America and the West Indies (CSPCS)*, 1702, 20, Barbados Council, Minutes, October 27, pp. 691-92. Early Barbados Council minutes, published in the CSPCS, record slave executions, but the reasons for the executions are rarely stated. When running away is specified, the minutes usually omit the escape period. However, it can be conjectured that, as in the above-cited case, executions applied to Maroons who had been absent for considerable periods (e.g., PRO, CSPCS, 1684, 11, Barbados Council Minutes, December 9, p. 747; 1700, 18, Barbados Council Minutes, August 6, pp. 465-67; 1701, 19, Barbados Council Minutes, September 2, pp. 737-38).

25. HofC, PP, Accounts and Papers 34, no 746, 1791, Minutes of the Evidence Taken before a Committee of the House of Commons ... Examination of Witnesses Respecting the African Slave Trade, Testimony by Captain Cook, pp. 199-205.

26. *Barbados Mercury*, July 19, November 8, 1783; October 13, 1787; February 6, 1816; January 6, 1824.

27. *Barbados Mercury*, April 19, July 19, October 11, 25, 1783; March 3, November 6, 1784; August 28, 1787; May 31, June 6, 17, 1788; January 1, February 5, March 2, 1805; January 23, 30, 1816; January 31, February 2, 13, 23, 27, October 2, November 20, 1819; *The Barbadian*, March 16, October 1, November 12, 1824.

These findings are close to those Heuman (1985:103-4) independently derived in his study of nineteenth-century runaways. He classified absence durations into "short (under two weeks), medium (two weeks to three months), and long (over three months)." The majority (65 percent) were absent for under two weeks, suggesting that they were only temporary absentees and "intended to return." In correlating length of absence with several variables, Heuman found that males were "heavily represented ... in the medium and long categories," reflecting, he suggests, an emphasis on their seeking anonymity within the freedman community in town or escaping abroad; females, on the other hand, "may have escaped more often for relatively short periods to visit family or friends." About 35 percent of the runaways had been absent two weeks to three months, while 8 percent had escaped for at least three months. In fact, Heuman (1985:104) suggests that "slaves appearing in the [newspaper] advertisements were probably away a minimum of two months and perhaps longer." Heuman (1985:102-3) also discovered that the greatest incidence of absenteeism occurred during July and August. His explanation for this pattern, "at least for plantation slaves," involves several factors relating to the agricultural cycle and labor needs.

28. University of London Library (ULL), Newton Papers 523/110, 523/111, 523/122, 523/123, daily worklogs of the Newton and Seawell plantations 1796-97 and 1798.

29. West India Committee Library, London, Alleyne Letters, John F. Alleyne to Benjamin Storey, September 24, 1801.
30. ULL, Newton Papers 523/709, R. Haynes to T. Lane, October 21, 1813.
31. *Barbados Mercury* January 23, 1816.
32. PRO, *CSPCS*, 1703, no. 21, Barbados Attorney General to Council for Trade, pp. 754-55; see also Gordon 1719.
33. *Barbados Mercury*, August 30, 1783; January 10, 1784; April 1, 1788; February 12, 1805; November 9, 1819.
34. PRO, CO 1/22, no. 55, A Treaty between His Excellency William Lord Willoughby ... and Several Chief Captains of the Island of St. Vincent, March 23, 1668.
35. PRO, CO 1/36, no. 20, Jonathan Atkins, An Account of His Majesty's Island of Barbadoes and the Government Thereof, February 1676.
36. PRO, *CSPCS*, 1675-76, 9, William Stapleton, Answers to Queries of Lords of Trade and Plantations, November 22, 1676, pp. 497-502.
37. PRO, *CSPCS*, 1706-8, 23, Mitford Crowe to Council of Trade and Plantations, November 5, 1707, pp. 579-81; Douglass 1755, I:132.
38. PRO, *CSPCS*, 1717-18, 30, J. Graggs to Council of Trade and Plantations, November 17, 1718, p. 394; *CSPCS*, 1696-97, 15, Memorial of the Agents for Barbados to Council of Trade and Plantations, July 10, 1697, pp. 544-45.
39. PRO, *CSPCS*, 1717-18, 30, "List of Thirty-One Negroes," November 27, 1718, p. 396.
40. PRO, *CSPCS*, 1708-09, 24, Rowland Tryon to [William Popple?], May 25, 1709, pp. 318-19. See also *CSPCS* 1717-18, 30, J. Graggs to Council of Trade and Plantations, November 17, 1718, p. 394; Gordon 1719.
41. PRO, *CSPCS*, 1722-23, 33, Samuel Cox to Council of Trade and Plantations, February 9, 1722, pp. 16-18; also Hall 1764:283.
42. PRO, *CSPCS*, 1724-25, 34, Henry Worsley to Duke of Newcastle, October 2, 1725, pp. 449-50; cf. Pitman 1917:293.
43. *Barbados Mercury*, January 25, 1788.
44. Rawlin 1699:32; Hall 1764:35-42, 116, 172, 198; PRO, CO 30/2 Barbados Assembly and Council, An Act ... Negroes, September 27, 1661.
45. *Barbados Mercury*, February 2, 1819.
46. SRO, Seaforth Papers, GD 46/7/7, Francis Seaforth to E. Nepean, July 20, 1802.
47. SRO, Seaforth Papers, GD 46/7/7, Francis Seaforth to Captain Hardy, July 7, 1803.
48. *Barbados Mercury*, November 20, 1819; January 19, 1805.

49. *Barbados Chronicle or Caribbean Courier*, March 12-16, 1808.
50. ULL, Newton Papers 523/703, Blackman to T. Lane, August 18, 1813; 523/709, R. Haynes to T. Lane, October 21, 1813.
51. Cf. Bennett 1958:27. "By good experience it is well known that many ... slaves are worthy of great trust and confidence," wrote the Barbados legislature in 1697 when it passed a militia act allowing for the arming of slaves in contingency situations (Hall 1764:138-55); similar provisions respecting slaves "worthy of great trust and confidence," were enacted in earlier and later years (Handler 1984). A decree by the Barbados governor in 1666 appears to have been the earliest provision for the arming of slaves in emergencies (Handler 1984:8); this provision also appears to have been the earliest of its kind in the British Caribbean or mainland colonies (see Voelz 1993:23-32).
52. *Barbados Mercury*, January 8, 1805; also *Barbados Mercury*, January 23, 1816; October 12, 1819.
53. PRO, CO 30/2, Barbados Assembly and Council, An Act ... Negroes, September 27, 1661; HofC, PP 25, Barbados Assembly and Council, 1826, An Act to Repeal Several Acts and Clauses of Acts Respecting Slaves, clause 57; Hall 1764:112-21.
54. PRO, CO 30/2, Barbados Assembly and Council, An Act ... Negroes, September 27, 1661; CO 30/2 A Supplement Act ... Negroes, April 21, 1676; Hall 1764:114.
55. PRO, Barbados Council, Minutes 1654-58, September 3, 1657; also November 6, 1655 and September 3, 1657. Referring to the late 1640s, Ligon (1657:105) wrote that bloodhounds were the only "useful" dogs in Barbados because they "guide us to the runaway Negres, who ... harbour themselves in woods and caves." In the well-known map of Barbados, published in Ligon's book, a European on horseback is depicted chasing two Maroons (Figure 1).
56. PRO, CO 30/2, Barbados Assembly and Council, An Act ... Negroes, September 21, 1661; HofC PP 25, Barbados Assembly and Council, 1826, An Act to Repeal Several Acts and Clauses of Acts Respecting Slaves, clause 12; Hall 1764:120, 286-87.
57. SRO, Seaforth Papers, GD 46/7/7, Francis Seaforth to E. Nepean, July 20, 1802; Rolph 1836:29.
58. Hall 1764:115, 323-25; PRO, CO 30/2, Barbados Assembly and Council, An Act ... Negroes, September 21, 1661; CO 30/20, no. 351, An Act to Repeal Part of an Act Called an Act for the Governing of Negroes and for Building and Regulation a New Cage, December 2, 1817; HofC; PP 25, Barbados Assembly and Council, 1826, An Act to Repeal Several Acts and Clauses of Acts Respecting Slaves, clauses 13-15; PP 28, Report 353, J. Walton to Colonel Gibbons, November 30, 1825.
59. West India Committee Library, Alleyne Letters, John F. Alleyne to Benjamin Storey, September 24, 1801; British Library, London, Lowther Plantation, Additional Mss. 43507, fols. 1-5, The Barbadoes Plantation-Accompts. Commencing January 1st 1756 and Ending December 31, 1756; ULL, Newton Papers 523/115, Journal, Seawell Plantation, January 1-December 31, 1797; Bennett 1958:4.

60. HofC, *PP* 28, Report 353, J. Walton to Colonel Gibbons, November 30, 1825.
61. Unless otherwise specified, materials on the provost marshal's office derive from the following: Jennings 1654:43-45, 82, 146-48; Hall 1764:114, 467; Dwarris 1827:57, 108-10; PRO, CO 30/2, Barbados Assembly and Council, An Act ... Negroes, September 21, 1661; CO 30/20, no. 351, An Act to Repeal Part ... Cage, December 2, 1817; Hof C, *PP* 28, Report 353, letter J. Walton to Colonel Gibbons, November 30, 1825; Barbados Assembly and Council, 1826, *PP* 25, An Act to Repeal Several Acts and Clauses of Acts Respecting Slaves, clauses 13-15.
62. PRO, CO 30/21, no. 521, An Act to Authorize the Confining of Slaves in the Slave Prison in Speightstown, October 14, 1828.
63. Hall 1764:115; PRO, *CSPCS* 1685-88, 12, Barbados Council, Minutes, October 30, 1688, p. 616.
64. PRO, CO 31/47, [A Petition] of the Inhabitants and Merchants of Bridgetown, September 9, 1817; CO 30/20, no. 351, An Act to Repeal Part ... Cage, December 2, 1817; cf. Shilstone 1933. The new cage's exterior or interior dimensions are not mentioned, but for the first time it was specified that males and females should be placed in separate compartments with no more than eleven of each sex being confined at one time; if more than eleven were in custody, those in the cage the longest were to be removed to the "common gaol." These provisions were continued in the "slave consolidation act" which also went into greater detail than ever before on reforming the confinement and release procedures for Maroons.
65. In 1708, for example, a slave was to receive forty lashes if he helped another remove the iron collars and leg fetters often put on captured runaways. A 1731 law imposed on slaves who hid runaways, as well the runaways they hid, twenty-one lashes for the first offense, thirty-nine for the second, and thirty-nine for the third which also brought branding an R (for "runaway" on the "right cheek with a hot iron"; for a comparable offense in later years the slave was to receive a maximum of thirty-nine lashes (Baskett 1732:223; Hall 1764:286-87; HofC, *PP* 25, Barbados Assembly and Council, 1826, An Act to Repeal Several Acts and Clauses of Acts Respecting Slaves, clause 55). Branding was common for serious offenses by the mid-seventeenth century (Handler 1967:66-67), but it does not seem to have been legislated as a punishment for repeated offenders until 1731 (Hall 1764:286-87). Branding appears to have virtually disappeared by the 1760s (Minutes of the Evidence Taken Before a Committee of the House of Commons ... for the Abolition of the Slave Trade 1790, Testimonies by Robert B. Nicholls and Thomas G. Rees, p. 336), and, according to Dickson (1789: 122, 124), it was non-existent in the 1770s and early 1780s. The 1731 law was formally repealed by the 1826 "slave consolidation act," wherein branding is not even mentioned.
66. Baskett 1732:222-23, HofC, *PP* 30, Minutes of the Evidence Taken Before a Committee of the House of Commons ... for the Abolition of the Slave Trade 1790, Testimonies by Robert B. Nicholls and Thomas G. Rees, pp. 325-60; pp. 247-64.
67. HofC, *PP* 25, Barbados Assembly and Council, 1826, An Act to Repeal Several Acts and Clauses of Acts Respecting Slaves, clause 47.

68. PRO, CO 30/2, Barbados Assembly and Council, An Act ... Negroes, September 27, 1661; Hall 1764:120.
69. There are only meagre data on resistance to arrest. In 1806, Richard Wyvill, a British army officer, observed the arrest of a runaway who "was brought in with his hands tied behind him"; the man tore away from his captors and "leaped over the railing of the bridge and was smothered in the mud" (Handler 1975:25). Given the severity of punishments one can speculate that resistance to arrest assumed several forms, but directly attacking whites involved the ultimate risk. In one case, a group of slaves accosted and murdered a slave who had been sent out to retrieve a runaway, although there may have been other motives involved in this murder (*Barbados Mercury*, January 23, 1816).
70. The white population averaged about 20 percent of the island's population during the late eighteenth century and about 17 percent in the pre-emancipation decades of the nineteenth (Handler 1974:18-19).
71. *The Barbadian*, May 11, 1833; PRO, CO 28/111, Lionel Smith to Stanley, November 26, 1833.
72. British Library, Additional Mss. 43507, fols. 1-5, Lowther Plantation, the Barbadoes Plantation-Accompts, 1756; ULL, Newton Papers 523/110, 111, 122, 123, daily worklogs of the Newton and Seawell plantations 1796-97; 523/288, 292 "Report on the Negroes," Newton Plantation, July 2, 1796 and Seawell Plantation, July 16, 1796; Bennett 1958:26.
73. HofC, *PP* 28, Report 353, J. Walton to Colonel Gibbons, November 30, 1825; cf. Heuman 1985.
74. Dickson (1789:124) opined that although Jamaica had about three times as many slaves as Barbados, at least ten times as many runaways were advertised in one Jamaican newspaper as in Barbados' two newspapers in the 1770s and 1780s.
75. HofC, *PP* 26, Queries from ... Governor Parry, Answered by a Planter of 1068 acres [Joshua Steele], pp. 24-36; also *PP* 26, Report of the Lords of the Committee of Council ... Concerning the Present State of the Trade of Africa, John Braithwaite Replies to Queries, part 3; ULL, Newton Papers 523/381-1, S. Wood to T. Lane, October 19, 1798.
76. E.g., *Barbados Gazette*, November 29, 1752; HofC, *PP* 30, Minutes of the Evidence Taken Before a Committee of the House of Commons ... for the Abolition of the Slave Trade, Testimonies by Robert B. Nicholls and Thomas G. Rees, p. 339 and p. 249; ULL, Newton Papers, 523/423, S. Wood to T. Lane, October 21, 1800; Yearwood 1949.
77. HofC, *PP*, 34, no. 746, Minutes of the Evidence Taken Before a Committee of the House of Commons ... Respecting the African Slave Trade, Testimony by Captain Cook, p. 204.
78. *Barbados Mercury*, January 30, 1819.
79. E.g., *Barbados Mercury* October 5, 1783; *The Barbadian*, October 1, 1824.



80. Most Africans in my sample were identified with one form or another of tooth mutilation/modification, such as filing or chipping, or body scarification, i.e. "country marks." These practices of African origin were also sometimes present in the wider Barbadian slave population, but persons so marked were invariably of African birth – neither dental mutilation/modification nor body scarification took place in Barbados (or most other New World areas for that matter). One reason why these practices were not continued in the New World may relate to marronage and avoidance of behavior which could have produced permanent identification marks (Handler, Corruccini & Mutaw 1982; Handler 1994).

81. Higman (1984:388), however, indicates that Africans in Bridgetown's urban environment absconded at a disproportionately higher rate than those in the rural areas. He reports that in 1817 (the only year for which he has statistical data), while Africans comprised about 18 percent of Bridgetown's slaves, they constituted about 21 percent of the town slaves identified as "absent" by their owners.

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