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Trevor Burnard

Slave Naming Patterns: Onomastics and the Taxonomy of Race in Eighteenth-Century

Jamaica Every year, slave owners responsible for managing estates were required by Jamaican law to submit to the local vestry an account of the whites, slaves, and livestock on their properties. Whites were listed by first name and surname; slaves were denoted by first name, sometimes accompanied by a modifier referring to age, occupation, or ethnicity; and stock were merely enumerated. Thus, on July 3, 1782, Thomas Thistlewood, penkeeper and proprietor of Breadnut Island Pen, rode to Savanna La Mar and handed to his fellow vestrymen the names of his thirty-two slaves. The list began with the first slave that he owned—an Ibo slave called Lincoln—and ended with his most recent addition—Nancy, the one-year-old daughter of Phoebe, a Coromantee slave purchased in 1765. He also noted that he owned thirty unnamed head of cattle.¹

Such compilations were common. The names of thousands of slaves survive, most often noted in the inventories of deceased white Jamaicans. This article explores the names of slaves as recorded in white-generated sources and speculates about their derivations. An analysis of naming patterns can help to determine the extent to which African cultural practices were retained or transformed in the movement of Africans to Jamaica, and an explication of the rules governing the distribution of names shows how whites, slaves, and animals were differentiated in early Jamaica. In particular, the names given to blacks indicate that white Jamaicans thought Africans (whom they invariably denoted as “negroes”

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1 Diaries of Thomas Thistlewood (hereinafter DTT), July 3, 1782, Monson 31/33, Lincolnshire Archives, Lincoln (hereinafter LA). I am grateful to Lord Monson for permission to cite from these diaries. References to the diary are by date and volume number.

rather than slaves) to be people entirely different from themselves. This argument runs counter to recent scholarship that interprets slave-naming patterns as signs of continuing African cultural practices in the New World. Despite the undeniable arrival of African cultural practices in the New World, the evidence suggests that slave owners, rather than slaves, were the originators of slave names. Hence, slave names are more a guide to what whites thought of blacks than an entrée into slave consciousness.²

That slaves were seldom allowed even the right to name themselves and their progeny says much about Africans' inferior position in a society indelibly shaped by European racist condescension. Slaves recognized the humiliation implicit in the names that they were given. When freedom afforded them the opportunity to name themselves, slave names became almost entirely extinct. Yet, at the same time that blacks rejected their slave heritage, they also rejected their African heritage in order to mimic, incompletely, the European oppressors that they, ironically, aspired to become.³

The taxonomic differences between the naming practices that Europeans reserved for themselves and those that they forced on their slaves were both considerable and onomastically significant. Whites always had at least one forename, invariably of standard English derivation, and a surname, and their names were remarkably unoriginal. Unlike Puritans in New England, who "participated in an onomastic revolution," discarding traditional English forenames for Old Testament biblical names, white Jamaicans stuck closely to old English ways. The European migrants to early Jamaica—more than two-thirds of whom hailed from metropolitan England—saw little reason to discard English habits in the tropics. Like settlers in early Virginia, whom they resembled culturally, they selected the names of their children from a very small pool. Twenty-five names accounted for 87.2 percent of 1,227 boys baptized between 1722 and 1758 in Kingston Parish; 48.2 percent of males were called John, William, Thomas, or James. Of

2 The primary sources used for white names are Baptisms, 1722–1758, Kingston Parish Register, Baptisms and Marriages, I, Island Record Office Spanish Town, Jamaica (hereinafter IRO), and for slave names, Inventories IB/11/3/16 (1732) and IB/11/3/33 (1753), Jamaica Archives, Spanish Town, Jamaica (hereinafter JA).

3 Gad Heuman, *Between Black and White: Race, Politics, and the Free Coloreds in Jamaica, 1792–1865* (Westport, 1981), 10–15.

1,130 girls baptized during the same period, 57.8 percent were called Mary, Elizabeth, Ann, or Sarah. The most popular twenty-five names accounted for 89.5 percent of all female names.⁴

English naming traditions portray children less as unique individuals than as part of an ongoing family and lineage. Names were so few that most people shared them extensively within their communities and families. White Jamaican parents preferred names already current in their families, tending to name children after grandparents in the first instance, and then after themselves. Parents also allowed for necronymic naming—the naming of children after a previously deceased sibling. The only major innovation during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries was an increased tendency after the mid-eighteenth century, to give children second forenames. Thus, Edward and Elizabeth Manning (née Moore) named their only son Edward Moore Manning, honoring both the father—a prominent immigrant merchant—and the mother’s family of distinguished planters and politicians. Similarly, when Walrond Fearon, the scion of a wealthy and long-established planting family, married Elizabeth Edlyne, the heiress of wealthy planter-merchant Thomas Edlyne, they named their sole daughter Elizabeth Edlyne Fearon. Henry and Elizabeth Penlington gave their second son the resplendent name of Robert Duckinfield Penlington after merchant Robert Duckinfield. This use of a surname as a white child’s forename created a more visible link to relatives and friends than the bestowal of an ancestor’s shopworn first name. It also bespoke a greater sense of individuality.⁵

The multiple names of white children distinguished them from slaves. Over time, an onomastic gap developed between Ja-

4 Daniel Scott Smith, “Child-Naming Practices, Kinship Ties, and Change in Family Attitudes in Hingham, Massachusetts, 1641 to 1880,” *Journal of Social History*, XVIII (1985), 543. See also David Hackett Fischer, “Forenames and the Family in New England: An Exercise in Historical Onomastics,” in Robert M. Taylor, Jr., and Ralph J. Crandall (eds.), *Generations and Change: Genealogical Perspectives in Social History* (Macon, 1986), 215–241; Smith, “Continuity and Discontinuity in Puritan Naming: Massachusetts, 1771,” *William & Mary Quarterly*, LI (1994), 67–91; Gloria L. Main, “Naming Children in Early New England,” *Journal of Interdisciplinary History*, XXVII (1996), 1–27; Burnard, “European Migration to Jamaica, 1655–1780,” *William & Mary Quarterly*, LIII (1996), 781–783; Darrett B. Rutman and Anita H. Rutman, “‘In Nomine Avi’: Child-Naming Patterns in a Chesapeake County, 1650–1750,” in Taylor and Crandall (eds.), *Generations and Change*, 246–247.

5 Probably many second names were the names of godparents—usually not noted in the records.

maican races: Whites had three or more names, often including two surnames; free blacks or coloreds seldom had more than two names, and sometimes only one; and slaves were usually known to whites by forename only or by forename and a modifier. Only twelve of 2,221 slaves listed in 1753 inventories (0.5%) were accorded two names. Intraracial onomastic differences were minimal compared to interracial onomastic ones. Whites fostered such distinctions in order to further their belief that blacks were inferior—more like animals than Anglo-Europeans.⁶

Underlying the foregoing statements is the assumption that the names recorded in slave lists were assigned to blacks by whites. If slaves themselves chose the names by which they were known in surviving primary records, “then the names have vastly different import and afford greater insight into slave life than if assigned by masters.” Most scholars insist that slaves played an active role in naming themselves. The retention of African names, they argue, is especially strong evidence that slave names emanated from the slave community, since planters had little interest in promoting African customs. The issue of which group was responsible for the naming of slaves is indeed crucial for determining the extent to which African culture was able to take root in the Americas, but the conclusion that the evidence suggests may not be the expected one.⁷

I have found no evidence that slaves named themselves, despite the retention of African names. Direct evidence that slave owners named slaves is sparse, but it does exist. John Taylor, an English migrant resident on the island in 1687/88, asserted that the white overseers were responsible for naming their slaves. Thomas Thistlewood’s richly detailed mid-eighteenth-century diaries

6 Of 154 free coloreds or free blacks living in Kingston, 1745, 37 (24%) had only one name. Kingston Poll Tax Lists, Kingston Vestry Records, IB/2/6/1, JA.

7 Jerome S. Handler and JoAnn Jacoby, “Slave Names and Naming in Barbados, 1650–1830,” *William & Mary Quarterly*, LIII (1996), 692–697; Cheryll Ann Cody, “There Was No ‘Absalom’ on the Ball Plantations: Slave Naming Practices in the South Carolina Low Country, 1720–1865,” *American Historical Review*, XCII (1987), 572–573; John Thornton, “Central African Names and African-American Naming Patterns,” *William & Mary Quarterly*, L (1993), 727; John Inscoc, “Carolina Slave Names: An Index to Acculturation,” *Journal of Southern History*, XLIX (1983), 527–554; Charles Joyner, *Down by the Riverside: A South Carolina Slave Community* (Urbana, 1984), 217–222. Melville Herskovits and Franklin Frazier laid the classical formulations of the naming debate sixty years ago. For an insightful modern contribution, see Sidney W. Mintz and Richard Price, *An Anthropological Approach to the Afro-American Past: A Caribbean Perspective* (Philadelphia, 1976).

confirm Taylor's assertion. In an entry from 1750, Thistlewood identifies slaves by the name conferred upon them, as well as by the names that they chose for themselves. The two were never the same, even when both were African. Most of the African names, such as Obraflommy, Cranke, and Naemina, are not found in inventory lists of slave names. Moreover, although some of the slaves had African names in common use, Thistlewood clearly knew them by European ones—for instance a slave that he knew as Dublin who also went under the name of Quamino.⁸

In 1761, Thistlewood wrote down the names of the slaves that he bought—Coobah, Sukey, Maria, Pompey, Will, and Dick. He also noted their “Country Names,” except for Sukey's. Coobah, an Ibo, went by the country name of Molia. The others were called Ogo, Owaria, Abusse, and Dowotronny (or Sawno). None of these country names appear in Jamaican slave lists. White owners had made a determined effort to rename their slaves—part of the transformative process whereby Africans became their property.⁹

Thistlewood stated several times explicitly that he named his slaves. In 1750, he noted that “Dinah (Adams wife) was brought to bed of a girl, called it Christian.” The name that he gave to his first slave, Lincoln, commemorated the English parish from which he hailed. His next two slaves were named Johnnie (a diminutive of a name common in Thistlewood's family) and Abba (an African name), and in 1762, he wrote that he had named a new purchase Sally.¹⁰

Yet, Thistlewood was not indifferent to either African customs or to the importance that Africans ascribed to their names.

8 John Taylor, “In Multum Parvo or Taylors Historie of His Life and Travells in America and other parts,” 3 vols., Mss. 105, Institute of Jamaica, Kingston. The balance of evidence seems to support whites naming blacks rather than the other way around in North America as well. Robert “King” Carter explicitly noted, “I nam'd [new slaves] here & by their names we can always know what sizes they are of & I am sure we repeated them so often to them what sizes they are of & would readily answer to them” (cited in Ira Berlin, “From Creole to African: Atlantic Creoles and the Origins of African-American Society in Mainland North America,” *William & Mary Quarterly*, LIII [1996], 251). DTT, July 15, 1750, Monson 31/1, 1A.

9 Ogo was a common African plantation name in Barbados. Handler and Jacoby, “Slave Names and Naming in Barbados,” 698.

10 DTT, July 20, 1750, Monson 31/1; January 3, 1756, Monson 31/7; February 27, 1758, Monson 31/9; and April 1, 1762, Monson 31/13, 1A.

He recorded, for example, that a slave driver gave his dogs names—Gainst Me, Fair to my Face, Help myself, Creole Women, and so on—that reflected the African practice of making names out of proverbs or statements. Thistlewood knew that his slaves had their own names, to which they assigned near magical importance. In one instance, he noted, “When Negroes are sick, their relations and friends usually gave them some very ugly New Name which they think may deter God Almighty from taking them, as they have such an ugly name.” That names were so important to Africans might have been good reason for whites like Thistlewood to assume control over them, thereby announcing their mastery.¹¹

From the late seventeenth century onward, Jamaica was a plantation society in which planters exercised a systematic and relentless power, legitimated by the written and spoken word. What Ira Berlin has termed the “charter” period of European-African relations lasted only a matter of years there, whereas in Virginia, it persisted for at least a generation. Unlike in Jamaica, however, relations between whites and blacks were relatively fluid. Slaves had more autonomy than did their descendants. One measure of it lay in the elaborate and exotic names—often with several forenames and a surname—which they were able to take. No such exotic charter names appear to have existed in Jamaica; slaves had single, planter-imposed names from the very start of settlement.¹²

Whites used a universal social language based on racial identification to describe slaves. They always referred to them as “negroes,” rather than as “slaves.” Mulattoes were occasionally acknowledged as such but hardly in their likely proportions within the slave population (just 2 percent of slaves listed in inventories in

11 DTT, June 26, 1751, Monson 31/2; June 23, 1750, Monson 31/1, LA; Philip Morgan, “Slaves and Livestock in Eighteenth-Century Jamaica: Vineyard Pen, 1750–51,” *William & Mary Quarterly*, LII (1995), 57–58, 64, 69–73. For the significance of names in West Africa, see Thornton, “Central African Names;” H.A. Wieschott, “The Social Significance of Names among the Ibo of Nigeria,” *American Anthropologist*, XLIII (1941), 212–222. In his autobiography, Olaudah Equiano explained that “our children were named from some event, some circumstance, or fancied foreboding, at the time of our birth” (Philip D. Curtin [ed.], *Africa Remembered: Narratives by West Africans from the Era of the Slave Trade* [Madison, 1968], 79). See Burnard, “Theater of Terror: Domestic Violence in Thomas Thistlewood’s Jamaica, 1750–1786,” in Christine Daniels and Michael Kennedy (eds.), *Over the Threshold: Intimate Violence in Early America 1640–1865* (New York, 1999), 237–253, for a fuller explication of Thistlewood’s slave management techniques.

12 Berlin, “From Creole to African,” 262, 265.

1753 were denoted as mulattoes). Although ethnic origin was a more common modifier (Creole Jack, Mocco Nanny, Papaw Juba, etc.), or age (Little Cuffee, Old Coobah, etc.), race was the primary marker of identification. An analysis of Thistlewood's diaries shows that he used the word *slave* only fifty-five times between 1751 and 1782; he used the term *negro* 3,166 times.¹³

An African name per se is not an indicator of whether a slave was African or Creole. The percentage of African names within slave populations remained virtually the same for both new and seasoned slave populations over time—similar for both children (seldom born in Africa) and for adults—even though the number of native-born slaves gradually increased. In inventories taken in 1732, 855 of 3,239 slaves had African names (26.4 percent), compared to 632 of 2,221 names listed in inventories taken in 1753 (28.5 percent). In 1732, 52 slaves were noted as “new negroes” of whom 13 (25 percent) had names that were African in origin. Children were slightly more likely to have African names than adults, but the differences are not meaningful; 213 of 788 children (27 percent) had African names, compared to 642 of 2,451 adults (26.2 percent).¹⁴

The most compelling evidence that African names say little about ethnicity comes from the detailed records of York estate, taken in St. Elizabeth in 1778. It lists the ethnic origins of slaves. As Table 1 shows, Africans were less likely than Creoles to have African names. Fewer than 13 percent of Africans had African names, as opposed to 29.8 percent of Creoles. It is possible, but unlikely, that Creoles were in a better position to name themselves than Africans were. For one thing, Creole men were less likely than African women to have African names. Moreover, most Creoles had names with no obvious connection to Africa.¹⁵

The limited genealogical awareness found in slave naming

13 John H. Lean, “The Racialisation of Society in Eighteenth Century Jamaica,” unpub. BA Honours Long Essay (University of Canterbury, New Zealand, 1998).

14 For works that infer African ethnicity from African names, see Lorena S. Walsh, *From Calabar to Carter's Grove: The History of a Virginia Slave Community* (Charlottesville, 1997), 300; Douglas V. Armstrong, *The Old Village and the Great House: An Archaeological and Historical Examination of Drax Hall Plantation, St. Ann's Bay, Jamaica* (Urbana, 1990), 36–39.

15 “List of Negroes January 1, 1778,” York Estate, Gale-Morant Papers, 3/c, Exeter University Library, Devon, England. For the declining percentage of Africans in the Jamaican slave population over time, see Michael Craton, “Jamaican Slave Mortality: Fresh Light from Worthy Park, Longville and the Tharp Estates,” *Journal of Caribbean History*, III (1971), 1–27.

Table 1 Names and Ethnicity on York Plantation, 1778

BREAKDOWN BY GENDER AND AGE	AFRICAN OR CREOLE	TOTAL NUMBER OF SLAVES	NUMBER OF SLAVES WITH AFRICAN NAMES	PERCENTAGE WITH AFRICAN NAMES
Men	African	148	11	7.4
	Creole	57	12	21.1
Women	African	81	18	22.2
	Creole	86	26	30.2
Children	African	6	1	16.7
	Creole	110	36	32.7
Total	African	235	30	12.8
	Creole	253	74	29.2

SOURCE “List of Negroes,” York Estate, Jan. 1, 1778, Gale-Morant Papers, 3/c, Exeter University Library, Devon, England.

patterns also suggests that slaves did not name themselves. Indifference to slave familial relationships was a feature of how whites dealt with Africans. Documents hardly ever mention slave living arrangements or slave kin ties. From a sample of 1,101 inventories taken between 1732 and 1787, only two—those of Abraham Richardson in 1732 and Thistlewood in 1787—note slaves’ family arrangements. For the rest, the only family relationship recognized, and then rarely, was the bond between mother and young children, especially suckling children.

Not even the Thistlewood and Richardson slave lists contain much information about family continuity. Richardson owned six slave couples with a total of nine children. He also owned a widow with five children. Just one of these fourteen children—Cudjoe, the son of Cudjoe and Fortuna—took his father’s name. All of the other slaves had names different from their parents, eight having unique ones. Thistlewood’s slaves did not share names either, although one slave child bore the name of his slave mistress, another had the same name as his mistress’ sister, and another shared a name with the mistress of his close friend and neighbor. The only exception was a slave girl named Fanny, who was named after a mother who died soon after giving birth.

This lack of genealogical awareness is evident in inventory lists other than those of Thistlewood and Richardson. Ann Mister, for example, owned nine slave women who had seventeen chil-

dren, each having a name unique to the plantation. Junia Young owned fifteen slave women who raised sixteen children, each of whom had a name not repeated within the adult slave population.¹⁶

On large plantations, providing a new name for each slave was difficult, partly because sales and amalgamations led to duplication and partly because slave owners' imaginations were limited. On York estate, 220 of 488 slaves (45 percent) shared a name with at least one other slave. Naming children after parents was rare, even on large plantations. By the time of his death in 1753, John Palmer owned 419 slaves. His inventory lists 57 slave women and 61 children. No child shared the same name as her mother.

This pattern of unique children's names and unregistered family ties are apparent in Craton's re-creation of the genealogies of Worthy Park slaves. Few slaves bore the name of a forebear. It is by no means surprising that none of the children or grandchildren of Braveface or Gamesome had names that honored their ancestor. But it is more surprising that Sarah and Betty had no children or grandchildren who shared their name. Betty had three children and thirteen grandchildren, each with a unique name. Two of Sarah's seven children (Kate and Nanny) named their eldest daughter after each other, but otherwise there was no name duplication among Sarah's children and nineteen grandchildren.¹⁷

If slaves had names that were categorically different from those of whites, were such names also categorically different from the livestock with whom "negroes" were usually associated in planters' records? Inventories followed regular taxonomic rules. Appraisers itemized the value of livestock immediately following lists of slave names and values. When tabulating the year's credits and debits, bookkeepers usually put "increases and decreases" of slaves (births, deaths, and sales) on the same page as "increases and decreases" of livestock. Nevertheless, despite similarities in how slaves and livestock were documented, most owners did not conflate them. The names of livestock were seldom recorded; those of slaves were almost always recorded. Only three inventories, all from 1782, listed cattle by name. All other inventories treated livestock as collective units.

¹⁶ Inventories, 1B/11/3/33/127, 226 (1753), JA.

¹⁷ Craton, *Searching for the Invisible Man: Slaves and Plantation Life in Jamaica* (Cambridge, Mass., 1978), 203, 206, 213, 218, 220

At first glance, slaves and livestock do not seem to have been equated in white minds. Yet, the onomastic differences between slaves and livestock could be distressingly small. Two of the three inventories that note names for livestock—those of George Mayo and John Hassell—used names that could have been given to slaves, some even of African origin, such as Quashey and Cuffee. Lewis Grant gave cattle names that slaves never had—Rover, Helfire, Spybill, and Poverty—but also gave thirteen of his cattle names that he had bestowed on his slaves. Such overlapping appears to have been common. It occurred on Vineyard estate where Thistlewood was overseer and on Spring Garden Estate in St. Andrew where both mules and slaves were named Quashey, Prince, Pompey, Tom, and Jumper.¹⁸

As Morgan has shown, the singular zeal that white Jamaicans exercised to narrow the chasm between the human and animal kingdoms accentuated a developing eighteenth-century scientific racism. That white Jamaicans tended to portray Africans with bestial characteristics that associated them more with higher forms of animal than with Europeans is undeniable, and the onomastic evidence confirms it. However, that whites allowed slaves formal recognition of their individuality and humanity by recording their names laboriously in detailed slave lists is evidence that the chasm did not entirely disappear. If whites had been determined to make slaves and livestock categorically equivalent, many more lists of livestock names would have survived, or slaves would have been listed regularly as collective units.¹⁹

The onomastic gap between slaves and livestock was distressingly small, but the gap between European and slave names was close to unbridgeable. White Jamaicans named slaves using naming practices that were noticeably more distinctive and imaginative than their own. Slave names were greater in number—334 for males and 230 for females—and, as Table 2 shows, more varied. They derived from Africa, from classical sources, from the Bible, from geographical reference, or from the English pool. But if slaves had European names, they were usually in the diminutive

18 For censuses of livestock, see DTT, July 15, October 5, 1750, Monson 31/1, LA. For other listings, see “List of Negroes and Stock,” January 1, 1784, Spring plantation, St. Andrew, Smyth Mss., AC/WO 16 (27) 120 (f), Bristol Record Office, England.

19 Morgan, “Slaves and Livestock in Eighteenth Century Jamaica,” 53, 73–76; Edward Long, *History of Jamaica* (London, 1774), II, 356–372.

Table 2 Slave Name Types by Gender

NAME TYPE	MALES (%)	FEMALES (%)	TOTAL (%)
African	26.6	30.9	28.6
English	24.6	38.9	31.2
Biblical	4.6	8.9	6.6
Place name	15.3	0.0	8.2
Classical	16.1	15.7	15.9
Unclassified	12.8	5.7	9.5
	<i>N</i> = 1186	<i>N</i> = 1023	<i>N</i> = 2209

SOURCE Inventories, 1753, IB/11/3/33, Jamaica Archives, Spanish Town, Jamaica.

form. Thus, John was changed to Johnie, James to Jimmie or Jemie, Richard to Dick, Elizabeth to Betty or Betsey, Catherine to Katy, and Dorothy to Dolly. Only a few names—George, Charles, Peter, Sarah, Hannah, Rose and Grace—were the same for both slaves and Europeans. Certain popular white names—Robert, Alexander, Mathew, Daniel, Ann, Eleanor, Martha, Charlotte and Alice—were seldom given to slaves. Although just under one-third of the slave population carried English forenames, it was still easy to distinguish slaves from Europeans. Slaves were always noted in the record by color, generally by English diminutives if by English names at all, seldom with surnames, and never with more than one forename.²⁰

A majority of slaves, especially male slaves, had names that were taxonomically different from European names. Two classical names commonly given to whites were Alexander and Philip, but only two slaves were called Alexander and seven Philip. Many slaves, however, had classical names that whites never had. Cato, used twenty-two times, and Caesar, used twenty-one times, were the eighth and eleventh most popular male names, respectively. Venus, used nineteen times, was the fifteenth most popular female name. Owners ransacked classical literature to come up with Apollo, Jupiter, Adonis, Ajax, Philander, Hercules, Hannibal, Mercury, Neptune, Daphne, Dido, and Juno. They also remembered their homeland by naming male slaves after such English

²⁰ Although many Europeans were customarily known by diminutives of their Christian name, diminutives were seldom used in formal documents.

towns and counties as London, York, Leicester, Bristol, Cambridge, and Oxford.²¹

Notwithstanding these excursions into the exotic, there were limits to white inventiveness. Some names were obviously intended to demean. Craton discovered slaves on Worthy Park Estate called Monkey, Villain, and Strumpet, all of which are present in Jamaican inventories. One unfortunate woman was even called Whore. Such overtly demeaning or satirical names were unusual. Slaves were more likely to be called Time, Fate, Chance, Fortune, and Hazard. Some commemorated special events, such as Easter or Christmas, and others were permanently stamped with an aspect of their personality, such as Love, Braveboy, Patient, Hopeful, Poorman, Fairplay, Hardtime, and Badluck. We can be reasonably sure that these types of names came from African initiatives, because Africans were more likely to name children after events than Europeans were.²²

The small percentage of names clearly intended to demean suggests a modicum of respect for slaves' dignity and perhaps recognition that master–slave relations were always a matter of negotiation, even if power was mostly on one side. Slave owners knew that the giving of a name was neither a casual affair nor a matter suited to levity. Naming to humiliate would have unnecessarily strained relationships that were already antagonistic.

Did African names also reflect African cultural initiatives? Was the selection of an African name “an act of resistance against total domination by slaveowners and their alien culture?” In Jamaica, African names remained popular until the end of slavery. No more than 30 percent of slaves had African names in 1753, six of the fifteen most popular male names and seven of the fifteen most popular female names were African. As Table 3 shows, Akan day names from the Gold Coast of West Africa were especially common, except for Auba (the female day name for Thursday) and Cubbenah (the male day name for Tuesday), which were probably avoided because they sounded too much like the names Juba and Cubbah.²³

African names were much more popular in Jamaica than in

21 Curiously, no female was named after a place.

22 Craton, *Searching for the Invisible Man*, 157; Handler and Jacoby, “Slaves Names and Naming in Barbados,” 691.

23 David Barry Gaspar, *Bondmen and Rebels: A Case Study of Master-Slave Relations in Antigua* (Baltimore, 1985), 132. Unlike in Jamaica, Auba and Cubbenah were common but Quacow,

Table 3 Most Popular Names Given to Slaves

RANK	MALE NAME	NUMBER	FFEMALE NAME	NUMBER
1	Quashie	42	Jenny	36
2	Quacow	38	Cuba	36
3	Jack	37	Mimba	33
4	Cuffee	36	Nanny	30
5	Quamino	34	Bess	29
6	Cudjoe	32	Maria	29
7	Tom	31	Molly	29
8	Cato	22	Phibbah	26
9	Dick	22	Abba	25
10	John	22	Phillis	23
11	Will	21	Quasheba	22
12	Caesar	21	Betty	21
13	Peter	19	Juba	21
14	James	17	Beneba	21
15	Quaw	16	Venus	19
16	George	15	Diana	18
17	Adam	14	Sarah	18
18	Mingo	14	Peggy	17
19	Prince	14	Mary	15
20	Pompey	13	Joan	14
	Hector	13	Sary	14
	Sam	13		
	Samson	13		
		N = 1,186		N = 1,023

SOURCE Inventories, 1753, IB/11/3/33, Jamaica Archives, Spanish Town, Jamaica.

Virginia and in Barbados. In Virginia, no African name was popular, for either men or women. In Barbados, Cuffee was the eighth, and Quashee the fourteenth most common slave name for men. Phibbah was the eighth and Juba the thirteenth most popular female name. Anglo-European names predominated in both regions, accounting for nearly 100 percent of Virginia's slave names and over 75 percent of Barbados'.²⁴

How much significance can be attached to the prominence of African names in Jamaica is unclear. It may well indicate the degree to which African culture was able to survive in an environment where 95 percent of the rural population were slaves

Quaw, and Quasheba were unknown in Barbados. Handler and Jacoby, "Slave Names and Naming in Barbados," 698-699.

24 Handler and Jacoby, "Slave Names and Naming in Barbados," 698-699; Walsh, *From Calabar to Carter's Grove*, 159-161.

recently arrived from Africa. It certainly demonstrates that white Jamaicans were willing to accept at least one African custom. Knight argues that Jamaican planters “had the instinctive ambivalence of a group whose hearts and minds remained adamantly European while their bodies responded to the overpowering impact of African ethnic and cultural influences on their brittle plantation world.” Slaves had African names only because whites accepted African names as suitable for slaves. But it is safe to say that these names were denuded of all meaning outside the context of slavery.²⁵

The weight of the evidence suggests that the retention of African day names is more telling about white concessions to African influence than about slave rights. What is notable about African slave names is their limited variety. Day names account for 65 percent of male slave names and 51.3 percent of female slave names. Nine African names accounted for 72.2 percent of the total for males, and ten African names account for 70.9 percent of the total for females. By the eighteenth century, whites no longer seemed to think of day names as African but as generic slave names. The use of day names does not seem to have been closely connected to slaves’ actual birthdays. For one thing, the distribution of day names was far too uneven and, for another, newly arrived Africans, whose days of birth would almost certainly have been unknown, were also accorded Akan day names.²⁶

Slaves, too, may have come to see names of African origin as signs of slave status more than as sources of pride. When slaves and freed people chose their own names in the 1820s and 1830s, they shied away from African names. In the Worthy Park plantation list of apprentices for 1838, no ex-slave had an African name, even though ten had used African names when younger. For example, Cudjoe became John, and Quaw became George. An 1828 list of slaves from Appleton’s Estate in St. Elizabeth compares old names with new names chosen after Christian baptism. None of the eighteen men and thirty-three women chose an African name. They changed their names even when no taxonomic difference existed between the slave name and the free name. Thus, Freder-

25 Franklin Knight, *The Caribbean: The Genesis of a Fragmented Nationalism* (New York, 1978), 64.

26 For an early use of Sambo as a generic slave name, see Richard Ligon, *A True and Exact History of the Island of Barbados* (London, 1657), 49–50, 54.

ick changed his name to Robert Boswell, Adam became Robert Ashley, Isaac became James Haslam, and Grace became Elizabeth Blythe. Another ten men and twenty women on Appleton retained their slave name and added a surname. In every case, the retained slave name was of Anglo-European origin.

Just 42 people out of a slave population of 418 (10 percent), 19 of whom were older than fifty, preferred, once freed, to be called by their former plantation name. Among this group were several elderly ex-slaves with exotic names—such as seventy-year-old Rhino and fifty-four-year-old York—or with demeaning one-dimensional names such as seventy-four-year-old Strumpet and seventy-year-old Braveface. For the most part, freed people chose names that rejected both their slave and their African heritage.²⁷

The names of freed people provide an insight into black attitudes toward their African heritage, even if the reasoning behind the allocation of particular names is not discernible. We can examine black naming practices through three sources: manumission records, which list the names of slaves who either freed themselves or who were freed by others; the Kingston Parish poll tax records of 1745–1770, which list 125 free “Negroes” or mulattoes, including both those freed during their lifetimes and those born into freedom; and the St. Catherine Parish Baptismal Records, which note the names of free blacks or mulattoes predominantly born into freedom. Each source provides information about different categories of freed persons at different stages in their passage from slavery into freedom.²⁸

What emerges from the data is that freed people discarded their African and slave names in favor of names with European derivation, preferring to identify onomastically with free whites rather than slaves. Nevertheless, blacks did not emulate white behavior in toto; they retained their indifference to genealogical connections and to current kinship ties. This onomastic distance from their ancestors is symptomatic of their position in white society. As Richard Hill, the prominent nineteenth-century brown politician put it, coloreds who had improved their situation con-

27 Craton, *Searching for the Invisible Man*, 296–304.

28 Sample of Kingston, Manumissions, 1B/11/6/5–9, 11, 13, 18–22, Kingston Poll Tax, 1745–70, Kingston Vestry Records, 1B/2/6/1–6, JA; St. Catherine Parish Register, 1672–1764, Kingston Parish Register, 1722–74, 1RO.

sidered themselves “blasted trees—barkless, branchless, and blighted trunks upon a cursed root.”²⁹

Manumission records capture blacks at the moment when they ceased to be chattel and became independent agents. What name to take was one of their most immediate crucial decisions (or one of their owners’). A sample of 409 manumission records of slaves freed in Kingston during the mid- to late eighteenth century reveals that the majority of freed people retained their slave names but others tried to change themselves literally into new people, swapping a slave name for one that signaled free status. Of those who kept their slave names, 285 (70 percent) had only a single name when freed, often one of African derivation, such as Mimba, Quashee, and Cudjoe; of classical derivation—Caesar, Cato, Nero, and Venus; or of British geographical derivation—Cambridge, Scotland, and England. Common slave diminutives, such as Bessy, Sukey, and Franky, were also in evidence, as were such standard English names as Mary, James, and John.

The majority of slaves were probably freed under their names as slaves. But a significant minority preferred other names, including surnames; others phased out their slave names more slowly, adopting an alias in addition to their slave name. Whether a slave chose or was given a new name when freed depended on a number of variables, most notably his/her skin color and especially the color of the manumitter. The people least likely to go under a new name after being freed were “negroes” owned by whites. Only one-quarter of freed people of full African descent had surnames; of these, more than one-third had a colored owner. Just over 20 percent of freed “negroes” with white owners had two names, compared to 36 percent of freed “negroes” owned by people of color. Significantly, although freed coloreds manumitted by whites were more likely to have two names noted at freedom than were “negroes” manumitted by whites—26 percent of whom had two names—they were less likely to have two names than were “negroes” freed by people of color. The implication is that colored owners were more conscious of the psychological need for freed slaves to change their name than white owners were.

The freed people most likely to have two names at manumission were people of color freed by colored owners: 65.4 percent of

29 Richard Hill, *Lights and Shadows of Jamaica History* (Kingston, 1859), 104.

the twenty-six freed persons in this category went into freedom bearing both a forename and a surname. Thus, Margaret Boyce, a free mulatto woman from Kingston in 1767, freed Mary Jane Cockran, a “negro.” In the same year, Elizabeth Carr (who also went by the name of Cuba), a free mulatto woman, freed her daughter, Mary Carr (who also went by the name of Cuba). By contrast, the two slaves freed by Thomas Bond in 1773, as part of the will and testament of Henry Paulson, were manumitted bearing distinctive slave names—Abington and Cornelia. In time, double names became more frequent; the percentage of freed slaves with surnames increased from 21.1 percent for slaves freed before 1775 to 31.2 percent for slaves freed during the last quarter of the eighteenth century. Nevertheless, color was at all times more significant as an onomastic marker than was chronology.

Freed persons’ surnames were always European; no freed slave had a surname that was obviously African or slave-based. The only possible exceptions were Diana Prince, Eve Prince, and Diana Rose who had surnames that were both common slave forenames and common English surnames. Strangely, few freed slaves had the surnames of the people who freed them. Just 29 of 409 slaves (7 percent) shared the same surname as their emancipator. More of those who shared their manumitter’s surname—12 of 98 (12.2 percent) compared to 17 of 311 (5.5 percent)—belonged to colored owners than to white owners. Slaves seem to have preferred common surnames (virtually no slave surname shows any onomastic originality), but they avoided surnames that reminded them and others of their previous status.

When free people chose to replace one name with another, they always favored English names over African or slave names, and when they sought to distance themselves from their previous condition as slaves, they took names that had more in common with whites than with slaves. The second forename chosen by each of the thirty-one freed slaves who had two separate first names—twenty-three with double names and eight with singular names—was of standard English derivation. The first forenames were a mix of African, English, and typical slave names. Apparently, the freed persons with two forenames replaced their slave name, even if it was of English derivation, with one that symbolized freedom. Thus, Hamlet, freed by Kingston merchant William Morgan in 1801, took the name James Hamilton, and in 1792,

Juba, freed by Ann Reeves, a mulatto woman, became Eleanor Phillips. Even when freed persons had no surnames but two forenames, the new name, or alias, was always English. Onimimia was known as Mary, Amba as Polly, and Cuba as Jeanie.

The pressures on free blacks to jettison the vestiges of slavery were strong. The longer they had been free, and the younger they were when freed, the more likely they were to have surnames and the less likely to have slave names. The Kingston Poll Tax records the names of 125 freed “negroes” or mulattoes who were household heads. Fifty-one (40.8 percent) had single names only; seventy-four (59.2 percent) had both forenames and surnames—nearly a twofold increase in the frequency of surnames over those of freshly manumitted slaves.

Freed people’s escape from the stigma of slavery was more complete if they had both forenames and surnames, particularly ones not common in slavery. Only six freed household heads in mid-eighteenth-century Kingston had names that were common slave names; none had names that betokened their African heritage. The most popular names in Kingston were John (thirteen) and Mary (eleven). Elizabeth, Ann, William, and Thomas were close behind. Free people clearly wanted to be not only free but white. Before 1760, this ambition was not beyond the realm of possibility. The Augier family of Kingston and the Golding family of Clarendon were prosperous colored families that managed to pass as white before mid-century. By the last half of the eighteenth-century, however, the advent of stricter laws concerning the nomenclature of free people made the shackles of racial subordination all but impossible to remove. Free people were hard-pressed to separate themselves from blacks and ally themselves with whites. Free blacks, seemingly without white ancestry, took such names as Richard Kent Ramstead, George Martin, Elizabeth Cooke, and Ann Brooks.³⁰

Erasing the stigma of slavery was also a prime consideration when freed people gave names to their children. The St. Catherine Parish Register lists 645 free persons of color—the ma-

30 See, in particular, a law passed in 1761 to limit colored inheritances: 2 George III, December 19, 1761, *Laws of Jamaica, 1681–1837* (St. Jago de la Vega, Jamaica, 1837). For a similar process in Saint-Domingue, see John Garrigus, “Colour, Class and Identity on the Eve of the Haitian Revolution: Saint-Domingue’s Free Coloured Elite as *Colons Americains*,” *Slavery and Abolition*, XVII (1996), 20–43.

jority of them children—who were baptized between 1682 and 1764. All but two of them had English forenames. The two exceptions—Plymouth, baptized in 1734, and Wannica, baptized in 1759—were probably adults who had been slaves. Neither entry noted the parents' names. Baptism clearly heralded the conferral of Christian names. Only twenty-eight of those baptized did not list both a forename and a surname.

Freed people may have aspired to whiteness but they did not emulate whites in every particular. Few of them had more than one forename. Eleven who died in St. Catherine before 1764 had two forenames; only two had a second forename that was also a surname. Likewise, just two in the Kingston Poll Tax lists had two forenames. More significantly, the naming practices of freed people did not follow white taxonomic rules. Slave parents rarely gave their children their own name (only 25 of 237 when both parents were noted, or 10.5 percent), and so far as can be ascertained from limited evidence, they never assigned the names of grandparents or siblings who had died. They tended to give their children white names, even when they themselves retained African names. Thus, in 1695, Mingo and Isabella named their eldest son John; in 1719, Pompey called his son Thomas; and in 1740, Venus gave her daughter the name Elizabeth Hambleton. But these white names do not seem to have been chosen for any reason other than to distinguish the bearers as free, closer to whites than to blacks.

Ironically, these onomastic tendencies placed free people closer to slaves. As Craton has shown, even in the twentieth century, black Jamaicans seldom have held a memory of their ancestors dating back more than two generations. The naming practices of freed people accentuated such lack of kin awareness; the sound of names and their aesthetic qualities counted for more than any connection to past or present family members.³¹

Scholars may be concentrating too intently on the actual names taken by blacks in Anglo-America—especially on the matter of their African origins—than on the survival of African naming practices. Africans may have discarded African names in favor of English names, but they retained features of African naming systems that evaded English values. West Africans staged elaborate

31 Craton, *Searching for the Invisible Man*, 341.

naming ceremonies for children, and they were more playful with names than were the English.

West Africans often bore several names during their lifetimes—some given at birth; some acquired during their lives, and reflecting some aspect of their personality; some used in formal situations; and some used as jovial nicknames. West Africans named children for the day or time of birth, for events that occurred during birth or pregnancy, or for a variety of kin and non-kin. Naming after prominent people, for example, was customary. It might explain why many freed people adopted the surnames of wealthy Jamaican *grande*es, like Beckford, Price, Rose, and others, who were not their owners and do not appear to have any connection with them.

West Africans were also less concerned with transmitting African names to their children than we might expect. John Thornton shows that in the Congo, Africans often adopted Christian names, even though they had not converted to Christianity. Some Africans shipped across the Atlantic to Jamaica may have already had English names before becoming slaves. Hence, we have to search deeper into black Jamaican naming patterns in order to find African survivals. There is not enough detailed genealogical data to permit firm conclusions about black Jamaican naming practices, either in the past or in the present. We only know that African names largely disappeared and that black West Indians have retained the inventiveness with names that was characteristic of their African ancestors.³²

Scholars might do well to give up the fruitless search for African survivals in Afro-Caribbean culture and turn their attention to how West Indians transformed and subverted European practices. Freed persons' names and naming patterns suggest the kind of bricolage with which blacks subtly altered European cultural practices to suit their own African heritages. In the late eighteenth century, for example, African-Americans abandoned their customary African dress for European clothing, including the wearing of wigs. In one respect, the decision to mimic white dress represented the abandonment of Africa in favor of acculturation to European norms. But as the White's impressive study of African-

³² *The Guardian*, 10 April, 2000, has an obituary of Bernard Alexander Montgomery Grant, the radical Guyanese-born British M.P., born in 1944 and named after two of Britain's wartime generals.

American expressive culture shows, the African-American adoption of the wig was so unconventional that Europeans found it strangely disturbing. Black hair styling that copied whites' seemed odd and discordant to whites, given the different color and texture of blacks' hair. Whites viewed it as mockery, and they probably were right. They felt uneasy about blacks using hair as a primary visual medium for exuberant display and a form of resistance, or—to use De Certeau's term—opposition, to white power.³³

African stylistic playfulness and creativity, on the margins of English culture, were forms of contestation forged inside, rather than outside, the slave system. We do not have enough firm evidence to treat black Jamaican naming practices as bricolage, or as forms of opposition, but given the pervasiveness of subversive ludic traditions in Afro-Caribbean culture since the era of slavery (exemplified in the carnival complex and even in cricket), it would be surprising if Jamaican blacks did not act as bricoleurs in their adaptation of white language, including white names, into black spoken expression.

The study of naming practices in eighteenth-century Jamaica tells us much more about white attitudes toward their slaves than about slaves' conceptions of themselves. Yet, white Jamaicans' willingness to use a small pool of African names from which the original African meanings had been bleached suggests that they were indifferent, rather than hostile, to the continuation of African ways in the New World. More important, whites did not burden their slaves with the onomastic rules that they followed for themselves. Whites, free blacks, and slaves could be distinguished by name even more easily than they could be distinguished by color or by social or economic position.

The markedly different taxonomies of naming within the white and black populations show that whites made careful categorical distinctions between themselves and the people that they considered racially inferior. Their limited onomastic recognition

33 For West African naming patterns, see Handler and Jacoby, "Slave Names and Naming in Barbados," 690–691; Thornton, "Central African Names and African-American Naming Systems," 730–732; and the works cited in n. 14. For two especially insightful works on how African-Americans and Afro-Caribbeans transformed white practices into new cultural forms, see Shane White and Graham White, *Stylin': African-American Expressive Culture from Its Beginnings to the Zoot Suit* (Ithaca, 1998); Richard D.E. Burton, *Afro-Creole: Power, Opposition, and Play in the Caribbean* (Ithaca, 1997). For Michel de Certeau's opposition/resistance distinction, see "On the Oppositional Practices of Everyday Life," *Social Text*, III (1980), 3–43.

of slaves' familial relationships betrays their belief that blacks had no interior life and no family worth considering. The long-term result was that Jamaican-born people of African descent came to share white disdain for, or indifference to, African cultural norms, including onomastic inheritances. By the early nineteenth century, names of African origin had lost all connection with Africa and become entirely associated with slavery in both black and white minds. Although blacks retained an onomastic inventiveness more characteristic of Africa than Europe, African names, notably Quashie and Sambo, became reminders more of their humiliations than their proud African past. Blacks dropped their slave names at the first opportunity—whether they were African, biblical, geographical, or classical fancies—in favor of names untainted by slavery. But despite what they were able to preserve as a legacy from Africa, Jamaican blacks were not entirely able to remove the stains that slavery had placed upon them, even after emancipation.

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