

ABSTRACT

The Urban Context of the Slave Plantation System:
Bridgetown, Barbados, 1680-1830

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This dissertation examines the impact of urban formations on the shaping of slave society in the Barbadian context. Bridgetown, which forms the physical locus for this investigation, was the capital town and chief port of Barbados, and was home to a sizable slaveowner and slave population. It is argued that in this urban context, there were significant modifications in the relationship between slaveowner and slave.

Slaves operated in an urban environment which offered more 'room-to-manoevre' options than were typical in the rural schema. Several factors may be identified as contributing to the distinctive character of urban slavery. These include the structure of discipline, the nature of work organization, the structure and nature of family relationships, interactions between owners/hirers and slaves in the work environment, social and economic differentiation in the white urban community, a smaller scale of slave ownership compared to the rural plantation profile, and the

influence of gender attitudes on discipline and on slaveowner- slave interaction.

These considerations suggest that systematic investigation is required into urban formations, in order to complete an inquiry into the complexities of slave societies.

In addition to the social issues mentioned, this study indicates the importance of the physical and economic characteristics of urban formations to the organization of social life.

It is suggested, finally, that the port character of the town contributed to a modification of the rural typology of master-slave relations which has characterized much of the historiography of Caribbean slave society. The demand for services in the urban port environment, and the influence of a mercantile regime on social interaction between the enslaved and the free, represent important areas of this investigation.