Plotting Emancipation: Formerly Enslaved Women's Foodways in Barbados

by

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THESIS ABSTRACT

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Master of Arts in Global Studies

Title: Plotting Emancipation: Formerly Enslaved Women's Land Use in Barbados

This thesis uses an intersectional historical analysis to explore formerly enslaved women's relationship to land and foodways in the initial decades of emancipation in Barbados, 1834-1860. Using methods of critical fabulation and reading against and along the colonial grain, I center Afro-Barbadian women's agricultural knowledge and expertise by contrasting the plantation monoculture with the small subsistence plots of laboring communities. Land is therefore theorized as both a tool of control for the plantocracy, and as a method of survival for laboring women. The historical analysis is situated into contemporary food security movements in Barbados to illustrate the relevance of this history to current day challenges faced by the island.

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DEDICATION

To the women of Barbados, past and present.

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I. Introduction

In September of 1839, almost exactly one year after the full abolition of slavery in Barbados, police magistrate John Carew wrote in a report to the colonial office of the recently freed laboring population, "a great many of them obtain by rent a small spot of land to work up, but how they support themselves, and the large families who inhabit their limited tenements, it is not easy to say."[1]Carew's words captured the post-emancipation cultivation of rented plots by formerly enslaved laborers, who, using their agricultural expertise, produced enough foodstuff to feed their families and puzzle British colonials. This dense cultivation of plots was steeped in a creole agriculture that Afro-Barbadians developed under centuries of enslavement. By cultivating the areas around their living quarters, enslaved laborers had added nutrients, calories, and variety to their diets. Planters' manipulation of land and food systems as a tactic of continued control upon the abolition of slavery, made this agricultural tradition essential to the survival of laboring populations. The gendered and racial realities of post-emancipation society further stressed the need for this garden space for women, who faced increased barriers to socio-economic mobility than men in the same position. The rented plot is therefore a significant site for the historical exploration of the lives of Afro-Barbadian women in the initial decades of emancipation, 1834-1860. These spaces reveal women's agricultural knowledge and illustrate the centrality of land in the transition to freedom.

Backyard production has resurfaced in contemporary Barbados as a proposed solution to recent food shortages caused by disruptions to the global food system. As a small island nation with an export economy, Barbados imports most of its food supply. The island has relied on food

[1] Barbados, Apr 1839- Mar 1840, Despatches: Apprentices, CO28/131, The National Archives, London, England, 182.

imports to some extent since its initial colonization in the seventeenth century. However, up until the end of the twentieth century, many Barbadians also grew their own food in "kitchen gardens"- small, densely cultivated spots in their backyards.[2] But the practice has died out in recent decades as a result of global free trade, globalization, and changing cultural values.

Recent global events, including the COVID-19 pandemic, the Russian Ukrainian war, and other conflicts have resulted in food shortages in Barbados, bringing the issue of food security to the fore. From cash incentives for the "best garden"[3] to street billboards encouraging Bajans to "grow their own" local produce,[4] food sovereignty discourse has been gaining traction, with the goal of reducing external dependencies. The local media, domestic government, and community groups across Barbados have suggested that the import dependency should be mitigated by an increase in local agricultural production.[5] But this is not suggesting an investment into the agricultural sector on the island, rather, this call-to-action is requesting that everyday working Bajans return to kitchen gardens to grow some of their own food for consumption.[6] This suggestion falls into a broader movement pushing for reparations for Afro-Caribbean communities. Discourse and organization calling for compensation and recognition for slavery and its generational consequences has spread across the region, but Barbados has been at the

[2] Sheria Brathwaite, "IICA Promotes Backyard Gardening for Food Security," *Barbados Today,* August 8, 2025. https://barbadostoday.bb/2025/04/08/iica-promotes-backyard-gardening-for-food-security/

[3] Monika Walker, "Green Nation Green Spaced Competition to Honour People with Bountiful Garden, Yard," *WIC News,* May 5, 2024, https://wicnews.com/barbados/green-nation-green-spaces-competition-to-honour-people-with-bountiful-garden-yard.

[4] Field notes, September 1, 2025.

[5] Sheena Forde-Craigg, "10,000 Plus Resilience Initiative Gets Under Way," *Barbados Government Information Service,* April 1, 2020, https://gisbarbados.gov.bb/blog/10000-plus-resilience-initiative-gets-under-way/

[6] Sheria Brathwaite, "Bajans Urged to Start Kitchen Gardens to Help Combat Food Insecurity," *Barbados Today,* October 17, 2025, https://gisbarbados.gov.bb/blog/10000-plus-resilience-initiative-gets-under-way/

center of these efforts.[7] Afro-Barbadians are expanding how they engage with their history beyond calling for reparations, by looking to revive historical traditions such as the kitchen garden. In fact, proponents use the historical relevance of the practice as an argument for the initiative. As Dr. Shantal Munro Knight, the Minister of Agriculture, Food, and Nutritional Security remarked: "I want Barbadians to remember the times when we could open the back door and pull something from the ground."[8]



Fig. 1 A book advocating for kitchen gardens found at the Barbados Museum and Historical Society. Photo by author, Sep 1, 2025.

[7] Janell Ross, "Inside Barbados' Historic Push for Slavery Reparations," *TIME,* July 6, 2023, https://time.com/6290949/barbados-reparations/

[8] Paula Harper-Grant, "Barbadians Urged to Grow More Food & Support Local Farmers," *Barbados Government Information Services,* March 9, 2026. https://gisbarbados.gov.bb/blog/barbadians-urged-to-grow-more-food-support-local-farmers/

However, the history of this practice is more complicated than this simple narrative suggests. Kitchen gardens emerged in the era of slavery and Afro-Barbadians continued their use widely following emancipation. Campaigns to increase kitchen gardens in Barbados should critically consider the origin of this practice. The historical reliance on the garden space is deeply intertwined with colonization, slavery, and the plantation economy under which it originated, and the initial decades following abolition in Barbados illustrate how these sites remained a product of colonial control. These insights are crucial to the current conversations around food sovereignty and can help with advancing an effective food security campaign, avoiding potential negative consequences, and highlighting the labor behind these spaces. As such, the story of the garden space in Barbados is one that can significantly contribute to the contemporary food security and food sovereignty challenges faced by the island today.

Historical Context

Barbados is the easternmost Caribbean island, and one of the smallest with a land area of only 166 square miles. Like other islands in the region, Barbados was entangled in the initial years of contact between the Old World and the New World. By the mid-sixteenth century, the Amerindians who once called Barbados home, could no longer hold permanent settlements on the island. The flat, monotonous landscape provided scarce shelter from the Spanish slave raids targeting these indigenous groups for forced labor. This left the island with little to no inhabitants upon its colonization by an English merchant group in 1627.[9] The initial colonial inhabitants attempted to cultivate cash crops such as tobacco, cotton, and indigo, but none of these agricultural endeavors took hold until sugarcane was introduced in the mid-1630s. The economic stability of the sugar market, combined with Dutch slave merchants investing in Barbadian

[9] Hilary Beckles, *A History of Barbados: From Amerindian settlement to nation-state,* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990): 6.

planter operations to adopt enslaved labor from Africa, made the colony extremely wealthy. By 1650, the colony was the richest in the region, and worth more than all other British' colonies combined.[10]



Fig 2. Map of Barbados. Public Domain. https://ian.macky.net/pat/map/bb/bb.html

This combination of racialized chattel slavery and cash crop monocultures became the blueprint for the plantation system across the New World. The production of sugarcane was extremely labor intensive and Barbadian planters relied on the continuous shipment of enslaved Africans to the colony. Plantation slavery placed incredible demand on the bodies of laborers, and planters treated the enslaved as disposable due to the continuous arrival of stolen labor in the Americas. Life expectancy for enslaved laborers was incredibly low, and this extractive colonial

[10] Beckles, *A History of Barbados,* 21.

project cost thousands of enslaved laborers their lives.[11] As the sugarcane empire expanded in Barbados, the colony the small island became densely populated as the slave trade accelerated. The enslaved population grew from 50,100 to 82,400 within the eighteenth century, compared to the smaller white elite who constituted just 16,900 of the population by 1800.[12] The financial wealth this system brought to British colonial planters earned the colony a pristine reputation in the Empire, earning it the name: "Little England."

Sugar's impact on European tastes was culturally revolutionary. As West Indian colonies like Barbados produced massive amounts of sugar with minimal labor costs, the price of sugar became affordable to the growing middle and lower classes overseas in Europe. Moving from a luxury item to one accessible to most classes, the demand for sugar skyrocketed and the industry exploded. As Sidney Mintz's work has shown, this sweet commodity was fueling the early industrial projects of Europe as factory workers relied on calorie-dense foods of which sugar was a key ingredient.[13] Barbados was therefore at the center of a global trade system that used stolen labor from Africa to create cheap, abundant calories in Europe.

As a transatlantic colony with a plantation economy, global trade was central to the way Barbados functioned. Not only did the island participate in transnational commerce through the mass exportation of sugar overseas, but Barbados also relied heavily on imports. The imperial project in Barbados systemically depended on the importation of enslaved labor from Africa, and

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[11] Jerome Handler and Robert Corruccini's examination of archaeological findings from the Newton Estate provide an estimate of an average life expectancy at brith to be between twenty one and twenty nine years old. Jerome Handler and Robert Corruccini, "Plantation Slave Life in Barbados: A Physical Anthropological Analysis," *The Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 14, no. 1)1993): 70.

[12] Beckles, *A History of Barbados,* 42.

[13] Sidney Mintz, *Sweetness and Power: The place of sugar in modern history,* (New York: Viking Penguin Inc, 1985).

the importation of food to feed the dense population. This system was relatively stable until the American Revolutionary War's near halt of trade to the island in the late eighteenth century. Thousands of enslaved laborers died from food shortages in Barbados.[14] At the same time, the war brought a dramatic decrease in the arrival of slaves to the island.

The decrease of the enslaved population during the American Revolutionary War caused Barbadian planters to dually increase land for planting provisions and implement pronatalist policies on their plantations. These changes in planation management increased slave birth rates and life expectancies. In the transition to the nineteenth century enslaved population in Barbados became increasingly creole-born while most other West Indian colonies continued to be dependent on imports from Africa. This placed Barbados in a unique position upon the closing of the British slave trade in 1807.[15]

Abolition occurred across different national legal frameworks and social movements each under unique temporal timelines. But the increasingly globalized international market and the role of slavery in this market joined these national actions into one global stage of interaction. John Locke's argument that all humans are born with rights and the subsequent Enlightenment era was mobilized by enslaved people in the Caribbean tangentially with European abolitionists to advocate for the eradication of slavery. The Haitian Revolution as led by Toussant L'Ouverture, instilled a spirit of abolition across the Caribbean, despite attempts from the plantocracy to hold onto slavery as long as possible.[16] The initial decades of the nineteenth

[14] Beckles, *A History of Barbados,* 72.

[15] Katherine Paugh, *The Politics of Reproduction: Race, Medicine, and Fertility in the Age of Abolition,* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017).

[16] William Mulligan, "Introduction: The Global Reach of Abolitionism in the Nineteenth Century," in *A Global History of Anti-Slavery Politics in the Nineteenth Century,* ed. By William Mulligan & Maurice Bric, (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013): 2.

century were characterized by a series of slave revolts in the Caribbean as the news of the self-emancipated Haitians spread. One such uprising, "Bussa's Rebellion," took place in Barbados in 1816 although it was stifled by the colonial forces just days after it began.[17]While Bussa's rebellion and others like it did not result in victory as was done in Haiti, these uprisings collectively instilled fear in the Caribbean plantocracy and therefore influenced the decision to move towards abolition. Under growing pressure from abolitionists in Britain and the fear of uprising in their island colonies, Britain outlawed the slave trade in 1807 before fully abolishing slavery in their colonies in 1834.[18]

Over 750,000 enslaved Afro-Caribbean laborers were freed under the Abolition Act. A central tension of abolition in the West Indies was the imposition of the from the colonial metropole despite absolute resistance from creole planters living in the colonies.[19] As a result, Britain made compromises with the plantocracy to appease them during the transition, one of which was the compensation of their lost "property." Britian paid planters a total of £16,573,109, £1,719,980 of which went to Barbadian planters, to both ensure the economic survival of plantations and to settle the frustrations of the planter class.[20] However, the enforcement of emancipation from across the Atlantic remained a central issue. To mitigate this, stipendiary magistrates were sent to Barbadian plantations to oversee the enactment of the abolition act and

[17] Beckles, *A History of Barbados,* 79.

[18] Bendetta Rossi, "Global Abolitionist Movements," in *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of African History,* ed. by Thomas Spear, (New York, NY: Oxford Academic: 2017), https://doi.org/10.1093/acrefore/9780190277734.013.945

[19] UK Parliament, "The West Indian Colonies and Emancipation," 2026, https://www.parliament.uk/about/living-heritage/evolutionofparliament/legislativescrutiny/parliament-and-empire/parliament-and-the-american-colonies-before-1765/the-west-indian-colonies-and-emancipation/

[20] Beckles, *A History of Barbados,* 93.

to report their findings back to the Crown.[21] Despite these measures, the social, political, and economic power of the planter class permitted them to find new strategies of control in emancipation. The result was a socio-economic landscape that differed little from slavery.

Historiographic and Theoretical Positioning

Both the historiography and the primary sources themselves frame post-emancipation Barbados as a continuation of planter control contingent on the limited amount of land which kept Black laborers tied to the plantation with low wages.[22] Archival journals and books from post-emancipation Barbados demonstrate planter and colonial consciousness of the advantage of a large population and a scarce amount of land.[23]Historians have debated the extent to which the ratio of population to land actually permitted the continued control of planters over the laboring population, questioning whether this element was the principal feature for maintained control.[24] While the value of a high population-land ratio for planters has been established in several works, this thesis complicates these studies through offering an alternative perspective on the connection between power and land. Black laboring women transcended planter efforts to maintain power through advancing their socio-economic positions using land obtained under the

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[21] Dawn P. Harris, *Punishing the Black Body: Marking social and racial structures in Barbados and Jamaica, (*Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2017)*,* 68.

[22] Beckles, *A History of Barbados,* 103.

[23] Greville John Chester, *Transatlantic sketches: In the West Indies, South America, Canada and the United States*, (London: Smith, Elder & Co, 1869); Joseph H. Kimball & James A. Thome, *Emancipation in the West Indies: a six months' tour in Antigua, Barbadoes, and Jamaica, in the year 1837*, (New York: American Anti-Slavery Society, 1838): 95460, Archives of Latin American and Caribbean History, Sixteenth to Twentieth Century, Huntington Library.; Rachel Wilson Moore, John Wilson Moore, and George Truman. *Journal of Rachel Wilson Moore, kept during a tour to the West Indies and South America, in 1863-64 : with notes from the diary of her husband : together with his memoir.* Philadelphia: T.E. Zell, 1867. Archives of Latin American and Caribbean History, Sixteenth to Twentieth Century.

[24] Christine Barrow, "Ownership and Control of Resources in Barbados: 1834 to the Present," *Social and Economic Studies* 32, no. 3(1983); Nigel Bolland, "Systems of Domination after Slavery: The Control of Land and Labor in the British West Indies after 1838." *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 23, no. 4 (1981).

very system designed to keep them oppressed. This analysis moves land as a unidirectional tool of hegemonic power to one of counter-hegemonic resistance through its mobilization; which was predicated on the significant agricultural expertise held by women who were once enslaved fieldworkers.

To position land outside of its dominant narrative as a tool of colonial control, I draw on theories of Black feminist agrarianism that redefine land relationships in the context of power. Agrarianism as a concept originates from the nineteenth century land tenure system which excluded anyone other than elite white men from holding property.[25] This agrarianism is inappropriate in the context of the plantation system, particularly given the distance between landowners and the labor of working the land. From a critical consideration of the role of white supremacy in shaping land relations, Black agrarianism recasts land as liberation and centers communal orientation while continuing to share core values with traditional democratic agrarianism including "economic independence, political freedoms, and cultural ties to the land."[26]By framing land as another element in the intersectional realities of Black women, Black feminist agrarianism is a rematriation praxis where "political identity, lived experience, and ancestral memory cultivate the agrarian cosmological and axiological frames of liberation thought, on and with the land."[27]This agrarianism rejects land relationships as contingent on ownership and instead focuses on how Black women have historically used their relationship with the land to resist and survive under the systems of oppression inflicted upon them, framing

[25] Liz Carlisle, "Critical Agrarianism," *Renewable Agriculture and Food Systems* 29, no. 2(June 2014), https://doi.org/10.1017/S1742170512000427.

[26] Katrina Quisumbing King et al. "Black Agrarianism: The Significance of African American Landownership in the Rural South," *Rural Sociology* 83, no. 3(Sept. 2018), https://doi.org/10.1111/ruso.12208, p.680.

[27]Shakara.Tyler "Rematriating to the Wombs of the World: Toward Black Feminist Agrarian Ideologies," In *Routledge Handbook of Gender and Agriculture, (*London: Routledge, 2021), 419.

"the land as the womb through which all self-determining resistance efforts are birthed and sustained."[28]The domination over and violence against both women of color and the land further solidifies this relationship as an intersectional element of importance to Black women's lives.[29] This framework therefore brings to light the complicated, but ever important, relationship between land and Black women in the context of capitalism, white supremacy and patriarchy. When situated into the context of emancipation-era Barbados, Black feminist critique dominant narratives of land and power by decentering planter landownership by focusing instead on the access and use of land by formerly enslaved women to survive, resist, and advance their positions in society.

Methodology

Drawing from methods used by historians of Atlantic slavery, I utilize reading along and against the bias grain, as well as critical fabulation to approach this history.[30] I use archival fragments around food and agriculture to further explore the lives of formerly enslaved women, including their survival, their knowledge, and their relationships. Conversely, I use information about these topics to complement my analysis of food, land, and agriculture in order to critically fill gaps in the archival materials. This method aims to triangulate information as I recount a broad retelling of the dynamic between food, land, and agriculture and laboring women in emancipation era.

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[28] Kirtrina Baxter, Dara Cooper, Aleya Fraser, and Shakara Tyler. "Womanism as Agrarianism: Black Women Healing through Innate Agrarian Artistry," essay, in *Land Justi*ce: Re-Imagining Land, Food, and the Commons in the United States (Food First Books, 2017): 95.

[29] Tyler, "Wombs of the World."

[30] Saidiya Hartman, "Venus in Two Acts," *Small Axe* 12, no. 2 (2008), https://muse.jhu.edu/article/241115; Tiya Miles, *All That She Carried: The Journey of Ashley's Sack, A Black Family Keepsake,* (New York: Random House, 2021)*;* Marisa J Fuentes, *Dispossessed Lives: Enslaved Women, Violence, and the Archive* (University of Pennsylvania Press, 2016).

In exploring women's stories who are not readily accessible via traditional historical methods, I follow Tiya Miles' approach used in *All That She Carried*, in leaning "toward evocation rather than argumentation."[31] Rather than searching for a significant historical finding, I argue that the exploration of Afro-Barbadian women's lives is significant in itself given the colonial violence they endured and the resulting dispossession of these women in the archive. I therefore align with Saidiya Hartman in approaching this history with "the necessary acknowledgment that we have inherited the violent past of our predecessors. […] systems of oppression are rooted in the past, and it is the responsibility of the historian to engage with the resultant present injustices."[32]

Reading Against and Along the Colonial Archival Grain

The analysis of the historical data borrows the methodologies of (post)colonial and slavery studies historians, using creative methods to address the bias of primary source base. Historian Ann Laura Stoler argues that students of colonial histories are quick to read against the bias grain of the colonial archive, as they often assume the lens through which it was constructed.[33] In doing so, she argues, they flatten colonial experience into a singular plane leaving the complexities and intricacies that may reveal key details, overlooked in the process.[34] Following Stoler's methodological process of reading along the bias grain therefore suggests an opportunity to enhance understandings of social and cultural details that trickle through various

[31] Tiya Miles, *All That She Carried: The Journey of Ashley's Sack, A Black Family Keepsake,* (New York: Random House, 2021)*,* 21.

[32] Saidiya Hartman, "Venus in Two Acts," *Small Axe* 12, no. 2 (2008), https://muse.jhu.edu/article/241115

[33] Ann Laura Stoler*, Along the Archival Grain: Epistemic Anxieties and Colonial Common Sense*. (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2009).

[34] Stoler, *Along the Archival Grain,* 50

pieces of society. As Marisa Fuentes highlights in her history of enslaved women in eighteenth century Barbados, the source base for Barbados is not only barren of voices from Black laborers themselves, but scarcely representative of any voices outside of white planters and colonial officials.[35] Using this limited source base, Fuentes creatively illustrates how reading along the bias grain for details left behind by colonial documents can give glimpses into the lived realities of enslaved women. As noted, the colonial source base expands to include more diverse perspectives in the emancipation era; however, the majority of documents remain primarily representative of white planter and colonial male voices. Black laboring women do not speak for themselves. This means that the lived experiences of these women remain out of reach for traditional historical methods, making this study well suited for the adoption of reading along the archival grain. Following the lead of Stoler's method and Fuentes' excellent example of its utilization in the Barbadian context, I use reading along the bias grain to center formerly enslaved women. In studying what is available and rethinking how to construct and piece together these breadcrumbs, these women can come into sight more clearly.

As Stoler highlights, the contradictions between colonial officials can serve as spots for deep insight and reflection.[36]Bi-yearly police magistrate reports form each parish on "the state of the laboring population" offer an opportunity to critically compare the variation in discourse provided by different magistrates. These discrepancies reveal potential differences in parish operations, lack of uniformity in colonial operations on the island, and potential biases and varying levels of truth from magistrates. Attempting to unpack these differences leads to the construction of various versions of the truth, which in turn are embedded with power and social

[35] Fuentes, *Dispossessed Lives*

[36] Stoler, *Along the Archival Grain,* 185

reasonings. Variation in accounts, while potentially problematic in a positivist framework, function instead as clues and insights into social realities under the social constructivist paradigm.[37] The differing realities reveal not just different perspectives on the situation, but different motivations of colonial actors. Additionally, variation in these accounts signal a warning around collapsing 'the laboring population' into a monolith. In fact, these sources reveal important distinctions between different parishes that may be correlated to geo-political differences in land use patterns, social expectations and norms, and the lived experiences of women working on plantations across parishes. Acknowledging these distinctions echoes Riley's argument that an intersectional feminist methodology helps "avoid a homogenous approach to women's studies"[38]and reaffirms the need to hover at contradiction rather than strain for uniformity.

Reading along the grain does not extinguish the possibility of reading against it. The bias of colonial documents in their prioritization of British and colonial perspectives is often that of racist, patriarchal, and colonial values. I therefore read the perspectives of colonial officials on the formerly enslaved populations with a critical eye and a sharp understanding of British nineteenth century colonial thought. Furthermore, emancipation captures a moment of deep debate within the British empire itself between those who advocated for abolition and those who

[37] Jean Mills, Anna Bonner, and Karen Francis, "The Development of Constructivist Grounded Theory," *International Journal of Qualitative Methods* 5, no. 1(2006): 25 35, https://doi.org/10.1177/160940690600500103

[38] Charlotte Riley, "The Archival Is Personal Is Political: Historiography, the Archive, and Feminist Research Methods," essay, in I*ntersectional Feminist Research Methodologies: Applications in the Social Sciences and Humanities* (London: Routledge, 2024), 145–59, 146.

disagreed with the transition.[39] Understanding motivations for these varying perspectives on emancipation is crucial when unpacking colonial archival documents.

Critical Fabulation

I adopt Saidiya Hartman's method of critical fabulation in exploring the lives of formerly enslaved women. The first part of the method "involves 'invoking a series of speculative arguments that exploit the capacities of the subjunctive- the what might have been."[40] Rather than striving to find a singular narrative of 'truth,' this method "liberates the historian"[41] to think beyond what is visible in the archive. The second part of the method bridges the past to the present through linking the affective relationship of the research to the historical; therefore writing the scholar into the history and placing a moral responsibility upon the researcher to recognize the ways in which their position influences the dynamic of the research[42]. These two foundations on which this method is built are representative of feminist methodological approaches to historical scholarship, especially given the necessary auto-reflexivity in this process.

Critical fabulation does not exist simply for the purpose of filling silences, rather "the method is a necessary part of engaging with the worst injustices done to those silenced by the archives."[43] This assertion underscores the responsibility of the historian to tell such stories

[39] Melanie Newton. *The Children of Africa in the Colonies. Free people of color in Barbados in the age of emancipation*. (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2008).

[40]Maud Rijks. "Narrativism, Critical Fabulation, and the Ethics of History Writing," *Leidschrift*. 39, (2024): 87-101. https://hdl.handle.net/1887/4198862, 91.

[41] Rijks, "Ethics of Writing History," 91

[42] Hartman, *Venus in Two Acts.*

[43] Riley, "The Archival is Personal is Political."

because of the power dynamics and inequality that prevented them from entering the archive in their totality in the first place.

Critical fabulation's engagement with temporality in rupturing the dichotomy of the past and the present, renders this method uniquely applicable for this research. Maud Rijks points out that "coping with our inherited structures of injustice (like slavery, colonialism, and capitalist hierarchies) as well as global threats of the future (like continued political upheaval, genocide, and the climate crisis) requires a re-thinking of the way we tell history."[44] This connection between the past injustices and future threats is the first way in which the method bridges temporalities, the second being the recognition that "the historian's narrative is grounded in the realities of today."[45] Rather than accepting the empiricism that has been disguised as common sense in the discipline of history, this method asserts that historical research cannot be removed from the contextual reality in which the researcher is writing from.[46] The method therefore aligns with intersectional feminist methodology because it leans into, rather than shies away from, the influence of the researcher on the work. Because the importance of this historical analysis is grounded in the present reality of food security in Barbados, this method's ability to connect past to present is crucial. By applying current feminist theory and methods to historical contexts, continuities, explanations, and reflections can emerge that inform current and future circumstances.

[44] Rijks, "Ethics of Writing History," 101.

[45] Rijks, "Ethics of Writing History," 93.

[46] "the British feminist historian Catherine Hall argued 'it is hard work for historians, even feminist historians, to do theoretical work since … our training is so embedded in empiricism': importantly, she followed this up with the caveat that empiricism itself is 'a theory that is rarely recognised as such' (Hall 1991, 207)." (Riley, 147)

Source Base

The daily lived experiences of formerly enslaved women do not readily appear in the colonial archives. The overwhelming majority of primary sources from this period are produced by white planters and colonial officials. Because "the very nature of slavery in the eighteenth-century Caribbean made enslaved life fleeting and rendered access to literacy nearly impossible,"[47]most formerly enslaved people remained dispossessed from literacy in the initial decades of emancipation. This lack of literacy combined with British colonial hierarchal power structures predicated on distinctions of race, gender, and class prevented laboring Afro-Barbadian women from entering the archive on their own account.

Unlike the primary sources from the eighteenth century and earlier, emancipation-era colonial documents are not exclusive to British colonial voices. The creation of the Court of Appeal in 1840 brought the testimonies of the laboring classes into the archive, although these remained filtered through the transcriptions of colonial officials. The archive is also expanded by the voices of men of color freed prior to 1838, who after receiving education in Britain, returned to the island as political and social figures. Several of these men were able to use their academic training to influence island society, including the notable Samuel Prescod, who used his position as a newspaper editor to publish counter-narratives to the planter-dominated island media.[48]These expansions of perspectives available in the sources following emancipation provide texture and additional points of view to investigate laboring women's lives. Despite

[47] Marisa J Fuentes, *Dispossessed Lives: Enslaved Women, Violence, and the Archive* (University of Pennsylvania Press, 2016).

[48] Melanie Newton. *The Children of Africa in the Colonies: Free people of color in Barbados in the age of emancipation* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2008).

these additional perspectives, Afro-Barbadian laboring women remained dispossessed from archival authority.

The primary sources used for this study can be broadly categorized into three groups: colonial documents, traveler journals and diaries, and personal fieldwork observations. Each group represents a different perspective and therefore requires a unique approach.

Colonial Documents

The colonial documents consulted include correspondence between colonial officials in Barbados and government officials in Britain, police magistrate reports on the status of the laboring populations, cases from the court of appeals, and blue book statistics for the years 1835-1848. These documents are various in their source and purpose and delivered several necessary details concerning variations between parishes, threats to colonial and planter power, land and agricultural values for colonial officials, disputes over rented land plots and the crops growing on them, and details of plantation life. The bulk of these records were accessed in their digitized format through the British Online Archives.

Travelers Journals and Diaries

Travelers' journals and diaries are significant to the study because of the outsider perspective they offer. These journals list descriptions of the landscape, the state of the laboring population, and direct quotations and conversations with planters, colonial officials, and occasionally the laborers themselves. The authors of these sources are white British and American travelers who visited Barbados for various reasons. Their outsider status to the island requires careful attention as their experiences there are often brief and are not foregrounded with cultural, social or environmental fluency of Barbados. Although this may pose a challenge for validity, these sources are helpful in capturing details that may otherwise be ‘unnoteworthy’ to a

resident of the island. In this way, the diaries and journals are approached similarly to historical ethnographies produced by anthropologists- as outsider views on an unfamiliar culture. Key sources for this analysis include: American abolitionists, Thome and Kimball's six-month tour of the West Indies in 1837 to assess the apprenticeship system in *Emancipation in the West Indies;* British traveler Greville John Chester's 1869 *Transatlantic Sketches in the West Indies, South America, Canada and the United States;* and *The West Indies, before and since slave emancipation* published in 1855 by British medical doctor John Davy. These sources were made available through digitization on open access online platforms including Gale Online Primary Sources and Google Books.

Fieldwork Observations and Positionality

My personal fieldwork observations informed several important pieces of this thesis. Descriptions of landscapes, the climate, plants, embodied food harvesting and processing scenes, and geographical landmark references were all inspired and informed by my two weeks of fieldwork on Barbados. The spatial and environmental details I observed add an additional layer of detail to envisioning and communicating affective and embodied realities for laboring women from nearly two hundred years before. I also use notes on my experience working with the archival materials to inform my approach to the primary sources. The incorporation of my field notes into my methodology falls in line with my intersectional feminist methodological approach which calls for the integration of the researcher into the research.

Intersectional feminist methodologies are incomplete without a critical engagement with auto-reflexivity and a consideration of research positionality.[49] Hartman's critical fabulation

[49] Charlotte Riley, "The Archival Is Personal Is Political: Historiography, the Archive, and Feminist Research Methods," Essay. In *Intersectional Feminist Research Methodologies: Applications in the Social Sciences and Humanities*, 145–59, (London: Routledge, 2024).

echoes this requirement with its reliance on researcher reflexivity and relationship to the research itself. Writing on Hartman's method, Rijks states "there is certainly a level of introspection, self-criticism, and scrutiny that should be involved in writing the history of non-white people as a white person."[50] Rijks' comment speaks not only to the historical roots and contemporary consequences of racially hierarchal societies but to the history of extractive research between researchers from the global north and research participants from the global south which have resulted in inequitable researcher-participant benefit, ethnocentric analyses, and (neo)colonial approaches.[51]

Considering this, writing this history as a white American woman with British lineage, I have made specific decisions in my framing, analysis, and writing, with the intent to decenter a Western approach to research. Because my lived experience is not racially or nationally homogenous with the women in the history I recount, I have chosen to use the work of Black feminists and Afro-Caribbean scholars to ground my theoretical and analytical framing. Indebted to these foundational works that guide this thesis, I employ their frameworks in effort to continue the groundbreaking work they have begun in finding creative approaches to uncovering these histories. As a woman of European descent, I do not pretend to use these methods exactly as Saidiya Hartman, Tiya Miles, or Marisa Fuentes do. Yet my lineage nevertheless connects me to this story, and I use my academic training and fundamental belief in critical race, gender, and ethnic studies as well as in interdisciplinarity to guide my approach to the retelling of this story in-line with these perspectives. I then supplement this approach with that of my theoretical and

[50] Maud Rijks, "Narrativism, Critical Fabulation, and the Ethics of History Writing." *Leidschrift.* 39, (2024), https://hdl.handle.net/1887/4198862.100.

[51] Pranee Liamputtong, "Cross-Cultural Research and Qualitative Inquiry". *Turkish Online Journal of Qualitative Inquiry* 1, no. 1 (July 2010), https://doi.org/10.17569/tojqi.83194.

methodological frameworks of which Black scholars of Atlantic histories have created and demonstrated their use.

Aside from my identity and academic positionality, I bring my lived experience to this research. My own experience of performing agricultural labor in the Caribbean is used to inform descriptions of labor. The sensorial experiences of climate, tool use, engagement with plants and soil, and food harvesting and processing are sensations that transcend temporalities and permit the embodied connection to women's labor in the past Likewise, my fieldwork in Barbados provided me with an experienced visual and sensorial landscape through which I texturized my written descriptions. Finally, in tandem with my feminist methodologies, I accept that my relationship with the archive, and by extension the past, is affective;[52]therefore, I treat emotional reactions to the archive as research findings themselves.

Barbadian Actors and Terminology

The main groups in emancipation-era, as defined by their socio-economic status in society, can be distilled into broad categories. The white planter elite, although outnumbered by the other classes, held most of the land, resources, wealth, legislative seats, and media outlets on the island. The merchant classes were not nearly as wealthy as these planters, but they occupied a position similar to the lower middle class, and had accessibility to the basics means of life. Finally, the lowest class in Barbadian society was the laboring class, emerging directly from slavery. The word laborer is not intended to reduce Afro-Barbadians to their class positions but is necessary to distinguish the specific class of formerly enslaved praedial workers. Other formerly enslaved Afro-Barbadians are similarly identified by their class positions as tied to their employment as domestics, tradesmen, hucksters, etc., who despite being in the laboring class,

[52] Riley, "Archival is Personal is Political," 153.

had more socio-economic mobility than agricultural laborers. Furthermore, Afro-Barbadians freed prior to the end of slavery and often falling closer to the status of the merchant class, are referred to their subsequent label of free people of color. While emancipation offered equal opportunity to Afro-Barbadians enslaved and freed prior to 1838 alike, those who were freed had obtained significant social and economic advantages that were no longer available upon emancipation. Therefore, free people of color remained a distinct class into the initial decades of emancipation. It is important to note that these categories are imperfect and do not represent the reality for every Barbadian in the early-mid nineteenth century. However, given their distinction in emancipation society, many aspects of life were shaped by one's class and racial position, therefore allowing generalizations to be deduced based on legal status at the time of emancipation, racial class, and occupation.

A Note on Gender

The majority of the actions performed by laborers used for the analysis of this thesis have evidence linking both men and women to these roles. Consequently, not every action framed as being conducted by 'laboring women' was exclusive to women alone. In cases where particular actions were taken only by women, or when discourse or law applied strictly to women, I have noted this as such. Otherwise, I have elected to take actions that were performed by both genders and evaluated such actions within a gendered lens of analysis. This is done not in effort to erase or diminish the work performed by Afro-Barbadian men on located labor plots or in raising families, but to instead pay homage to the experience of emancipation for laboring women in particular in recognition of the gendered realities that impacted this experience. Laboring men often experienced similar hardships and implemented the same tools of survival and embodied knowledge as women, but the gendered constraints on women's bodies and their social roles as

mothers beg the question as to how these circumstances shaped their actions differently than those of men. So, while the actions of men are not entirely omitted from this story (they are in fact, quite important to several elements of analysis), women are prioritized in this thesis.

Chapter Preview

Rather than a chronological timeline of the unfolding of emancipation, I take a non-linear approach to highlight the response of laboring women to different elements of transition. I begin in chapter two with an evaluation of food and land systems and their connection to power in the final decades of slavery, identifying how the plantocracy in Barbados manipulated their control over these resources upon emancipation. With the foundation of these resources and their connection to power established, chapter three begins to approach land relationships from the perspective of the laboring classes. Through contrasting the labor and agricultural expertise exerted on plantation fields and rented plots after emancipation, women's agency in applying their agricultural knowledge and labor is underscored. Chapter four asks how women mobilized the cultivation of their rented plots to survive and further their positions in emancipation society. Finally, this mobilization of land and food is brought into the gendered reality of mothering and kinship to emphasize the ways in which women's relationship with land transcended into community building and caregiving through combining "the labor of the land, labor of birthing and labor of kin."[53]

This thesis therefore aims to highlight the historical context of the garden space through the lives of formerly enslaved women. By asking how women used the land to navigate their

[53]Baxter et al, "Womanism as Agrarianism," 97.

lives post-emancipation, I complicate narratives that paint land only as a tool of planter oppression. At the same time, this historical analysis considers how planter power constrained the opportunities available to emancipated laborers, particularly for women. By using an intersectional approach that considers class, race, and gender as sites for social and legal control, this story sheds light on the competing demands for Afro-Barbadian women's labor and the response of women to those demands. The resulting narrative contextualizes the role of imperial power and control in shaping land relations for Afro-Barbadian women, as relevant to contemporary conversations of food sovereignty in Barbados.

II. Food, Land and Power in Emancipation Era

In May of 1838, the Barbados legislature declared August 1, 1838 as Emancipation Day in the British colony. Emancipation in its broadest sense indicates a process of liberation. At the end of the eighteenth century, the definition of emancipation was a "political term describing individual or collective processes oriented toward the assertion of personal or social autonomy."[54] The term was therefore used to describe the moment in which British colonial law no longer allowed for humans to be held as property, effectively ending the institution of slavery in the British West Indies. When taken with its synonyms, freedom, liberation, and release, emancipation paints an image of transformation- a fundamental restructuring of society with profound changes for those who could no longer be claimed as another man's property. As their own Emancipation Day ticked closer, enslaved Barbadian women pondered their futures as freed women. What would freedom bring for them? Where would they go? Could they finally escape the fields of the estate they had been shackled to for the entirety of their lives? While it was widely understood by enslaved communities that Emancipation Day alone would not bring the structural changes necessary to immediately elevate their positions in society, it did mark opportunity for change.[55] Freedom must have brought hope for a future that was fundamentally different from the one that they had been living.

But in the same moments that enslaved women dreamt of a life of their own, their enslavers were fretting over these same questions. Planters, who were overwhelmingly against the Abolition Act, were coming to a realization that they could no longer sidestep the reality that

[54] Simon Susen, "Emancipation," In: *The Encyclopedia of Political Thought,* ed by, Gibbons, M. T., Coole, D., Ellis, E.& Ferguson, K., 1024-1038, (Chichester, UK: Wiley Blackwell: 2015), ISBN 9781118474396,

[55] Hilary Beckles, *Great House Rules: Landless Emancipation and Workers' Protest in Barbados 1838-1938,* (Kingston, Ian Randle Publishers, 2004), 98.

the British Colonial Office would push forward with full emancipation. This wealthy class of enslavers had built their fortune from the institution of slavery alone, and losing this system, they feared would make their economic survival impossible. With an overwhelming presence in the Barbados legislature, and social and economic connections to the Colonial Office, the planter class began to brace for emancipation by manipulating their esteemed positions in Barbadian society. Knowing they would lose legal control over the bodies of laborers, the white planter elite searched for methods to keep laboring populations reliant on plantation labor upon their emancipation. For this, planters turned to two interconnected resources that could aid laborer's survival beyond the estate: food and land.

Food and land, and who had access to it, became integral to the unfolding of the story of emancipation. It was the answer to the planters' question of how to maintain control following abolition, but also the key to the laborers' dreams of liberating themselves from the estate. As such, these two resources became incredibly important to both the continuities and changes seen throughout the transition to emancipation in Barbados. The plantocracy's willful manipulation of these resources was central to their capacity to retain control of freed laborers.

Island Food Systems Under Slavery

The entanglement of power, land, and food upon emancipation was predicated on the foundational elements of the Barbadian food system in the final decades of slavery. The island's food system underwent several transformations in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries due to disturbances to the global trade economy and the growing pressure towards abolition. Under these circumstances, many estates shifted their provisioning systems to increase domestically produced foods.[56]These adjustments demonstrated that the plantocracy in Barbados

[56] B.W. Higman, *Slave Populations of the British Caribbean, 1807-1838, (*Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1984), 204.

were both capable of and accustomed to manipulating the foundations of the food system in order to best serve the economic interests of their industry. The changes made in this period set the stage for the role of food in the unfolding of emancipation.

The relationship to food for the enslaved was one of dispossession. Despite providing the labor for the production of local crops, enslaved communities owned very little of what they produced and were often reliant on the plantation to access adequate food. Consequently, disruptions or changes in the food system impacted this vulnerable population disproportionately. The power imbalances framing this food system underscore its importance as a hegemonic power in emancipation era.

West Indian Food Systems

The British West Indian colonies varied widely in their strategies towards provisioning systems, as each island had different demographic, geographic, and climatic conditions to consider. Planters ran their estates to extract as much profit as possible, and most of their decisions can be directly traced to the perceived economic advantage. Food was not an exception to this trend, as planters consistently looked for ways to cut costs on provisioning their enslaved laborers. First inaugurated in Jamaica in the seventeenth century, the system of growing provisions on the plantation became a common strategy throughout the West Indies to cut import costs.[57]The model to both import and grow provisions for enslaved laborers was used throughout the region, although each island took its own approach to balancing this strategy. "Home-grown" islands, such as Jamaica, dedicated extensive land and resources to grow the majority of their food supply in lieu of importation. On smaller islands, planters were less willing to sacrifice cane

[57] John S. Brierly, "Kitchen Gardens in the Caribbean Past and Present: their role in small-farm development," *Caribbean Geography* 3, vol.1(1991): 17.

lands to food crops and relied much more heavily on imports. These islands, such as was the case in the Leewards, were considered 'foreign-fed.' James Stephen who first made this distinction in the early nineteenth century, described Barbados 'of a middle character.'[58]

The extent to which plantations imported or grew their own provisions was not the only unique property of island food systems. How planters organized, oversaw, and designed their home-grown provisioning systems also varied throughout the region. Most plantations dedicated at least some land to growing food, typically by rotating fields out of sugarcane cultivation for to grow sorghum, maize, yams, sweet potatoes and other root crops. One visitor to the island described this method in noting that "the sweet potatoe [sic] is often planted immediately after the reaping of the cane; in the short space of four months I have seen two heavy crops taken off the same ground, impressing one strongly with the great capabilities and productive powers of a good soil within the tropics in favorable seasons."[59] Enslaved laborers cultivated these provision fields as part of their daily field labor, but like the sugarcane field, they did not own the rights to these crops. Despite it being their labor that prepared, planted, fertilized, and harvested these starches, the estate would collect the reaped crop and oversee its distribution. In Barbados, these spaces were referred to as "provision grounds."[60]

'Provision grounds' had a unique meaning in Barbados relative to other islands in the British Caribbean. In other islands, such as Jamaica, 'provision grounds' were pieces of estate land that were considered marginal by colonial standards, due to qualities like steep slope or rocky soil. Regarded as unsuitable for cane cultivation, the estate dedicated these plots to the

[58]Jerome Handler and Diane Wallman, "Production Activities in the Household Economies of Plantation Slaves: Barbados and Martinique, Mid-1600s to Mid-1800s," *International Journal of Historical Archaeology* 18, no. 3(2014): 449.

[59] John Davy, *The West Indies*, before and since Slave Emancipation (Library of Princeton University, 1854).

[60] Lydia M. Pulsipher, "They Have Saturdays and Sundays to Feed Themselves," *Expedition* 32, no. 2(1990): 28.

growing of provision crops. However, unlike the provision grounds in Barbados, these spaces of land functioned outside of the control of the plantation. Enslaved Jamaicans were free to grow whatever they wanted in these grounds so long that it did not detract from time working on the estate. They maintained full control of the crops produced from these plots as well, as planters did not manage the use of the provision ground. Often spanning acres in size, these versions of 'provision grounds' varied across plantations and islands and could be located among other fields in the estate or on more marginal lands- sometimes miles away from the villages.[61] But in Barbados, this version of a provision ground was non-existent. The flat landscape and small island area afforded little land to sacrifice for this purpose in the eyes of a Barbadian planter. However, enslaved Barbadians cultivated the spaces around their homes in a similar fashion to the free cultivation of the Jamaican provision ground, albeit on a much smaller scale. These "kitchen gardens" or "dooryard gardens" were another common feature to the enslaved lives' across British West Indian plantation landscapes.[62]

Barbados: Negro Grounds and Provision Grounds

In Barbados, the 'provision grounds' were the fields planters dedicated to food and fodder such as guinea corn (sorghum), 'Indian corn' (maize), and ground provisions like yam, eddoes, and sweet potatoes. Up until the mid-eighteenth century, potatoes and plantains were more commonly used as rations from the provision grounds, but this practiced shifted towards sorghum, maize, and root crops throughout the eighteenth century.[63] By the final decades of

[61] John H. Parry, "Plantation and Provision Ground: An historical sketch of the introduction of food crops into Jamaica," *Revista de Historia de América,* no. 39(1955): 11-12.

[62] Beth Fowler Tobin, "'And there raise yams': Slaves' Gardens in the Writings of West Indian Plantocrats," *Eighteenth Century Life* 23, no. 2(1999): 165.

[63] Jerome S. Handler, "Plantation Slave Settlements in Barbados, 1650s to 1834" in *In the Shadow of the Plantation,* ed. The University of the West Indies (Randle Publishers, 2002), 122-161.

slavery, the principal crop grown was guinea corn, which according to B.W. Higman's estimate from the 1804 Drax Hall and Newton Estate papers, outnumbered cane fields in acreages and accounted for 1/3 the total cultivated area. Guinea corn was the staple crop enslaved laborers received in their daily or weekly rations on the plantation, and the grain was also used as fodder for livestock. Higman's estimate argues that other provisions, including root crops and pigeon pea trees made up less than a tenth of plantation provision grounds at a maximum.[64]

Despite the diversity of crops field gangs cultivated in the provision ground, the rations laborers received were largely monotonous. Consistently motivated by economic gain, planters only distributed the least valuable of the food produced in the provision fields to laborers. Because maize and corn were the cheapest at market, planters often sold other more profitable crops reserving these monotonous staples for rations. It should be noted, that white Barbadians did not consume guinea corn, but rather reserved the food for cattle and enslaved laborers.[65] This devaluation of the grain by the planter class kept the supply abundant and cheap, but it also reinforced racial and class divisions by grouping enslaved diets to those of cattle, thereby further dehumanizing Afro-Barbadian labors as non-human property.

Rations could be given either daily, weekly or both, but it was typical for most laborers to receive them at minimum, every Sunday morning.[66]Rations held extra importance in the Barbadian context in comparison to Jamaica and other islands in which the enslaved had more access to land for cultivation. On islands where 'provision grounds' were unmonitored pieces of land; enslaved communities had a larger space to grow food for their own consumption. In these

[64] Higman, *Slave Populations British Caribbean,* 208.

[65] Higman, *Slave Populations British Caribbean,* 206.

[66] Handler & Wallman, *Production Activities,* 449.

islands, laborers could produce significantly more food than what was possible for those on Barbadian plantations.[67] Because of the more minimal role this form of provisioning played in Barbados, enslaved communities on this island relied on rations to a greater extent than their counterparts across the British Caribbean.

Although enslaved Barbadian laborers lacked access to larger plots to use for their cultivation, they still had access to the spaces around their homes in the 'slave village.' Enslaved communities resided in villages on the plantation, as each estate set aside land for this purpose. Planters permitted laborers to use the spaces around their homes in these villages to grow food for themselves. In Barbados, these plots were known variously as "Negro grounds," "Negro gardens," or "Negro land."[68] These garden areas varied drastically from the provision grounds, primarily given the planter's lack of involvement in these spaces. In contrast to the dispossession of the provision ground, enslaved Afro-Barbadians had full control over the 'Negro gardens' including decisions about how and what to plant, when to harvest, and how to divide up food.

'Negro gardens' were diverse intercropped spaces, whose fruit trees, vegetables, ground provisions, and legumes provided laborers with nutrients and flavors inaccessible in their monotonous provision allocations from the estate. In addition to the crops growing in these spaces, laborers kept livestock which could have been used for eggs, milk, and meat; although enslaved Afro-Barbadians most often sold such animals at market rather than consuming them themselves.[69]Enslaved communities used their creativity and knowledge in cultivating these spaces to increase the diversity of their diets. Laborers could 'work their grounds' before or after

[67] Tobin, "'And there raise yams'," 165.

[68] Handler & Wallman, *Production Activities,* 450.

[69] Handler & Wallman, *Production Activities,* 50.

their work on the estate, which typically lasted from sunrise to sunset. They may have also been permitted to work in the garden on their day of rest, either Saturday or Sunday.[70]This extra source of food aided in survival, providing more calories and nutrients and at times medicinal remedies for the enslaved who otherwise had marginal access to medical care. There are even records indicating that it was food from the 'Negro gardens' that fed planters when hurricanes blocked imports and tore up the provision grounds. Where the estate monocultures were destroyed, the diversity of the 'Negro garden' spared some of the crops, especially the subterranean root crops.[71]As autonomous spaces of production, these gardens were one of the few sites in which Afro-Barbadian culture could be formed and performed without interruption. As such, the 'Negro garden' was not only an important part of the island's food system, but of the survival, creativity, culture, and knowledge of enslaved communities. The transformation of the Negro garden under emancipation is one of the undertakings of this thesis.

Imported Foods

While Barbados did grow more provisions than other small islands in the region, the small land area and extensive cane cultivation of the island constrained the amount of land planters were willing to plant with food crops. Home-grown provisions did decrease import bills, but planters had to balance this saving with the amount of export income lost in sacrificing cane land to grow food. Converting too much of the plantation into provision grounds decreased sugar

[70] Brittany Mondragon, "Uprooted: Doorway Gardens and African Plant Cultivation in the Colonial Atlantic World," *History in the Making* 15, no.10(2022): 177.

[71] Sarah Lawson Welsh, *Food Text and Culture in the Anglophone Caribbean, (*London: Rowman and Littlefield International, 2019).

profits and threatened the estate's prosperity. For this reason, Barbados consistently relied on imported foodstuff from the United States and Europe to provision its population.[72]

The diets of the enslaved population mirrored the broader food system, meaning these communities consumed both imported and home-grown foods. In the same manner that they divided and distributed food from the provision grounds, planters also dispensed imported foods to laborers. Among the imported food allocations, was the common ration of salted fish such as herring or cod, which functioned as some of the only animal protein in the slave diet.[73] The near complete cultivation of the island under sugar cane with little area dedicated to provisions, made imports extremely important to ensuring enslaved populations had sufficient food in Barbados. While Barbados' food system may have appeared to be 'of a middle character' in terms of the land dedicated to growing provisions, its dense population rendered imported foods more important than in other islands with similar land areas planted in provisions. With over 75,000 enslaved laborers living in Barbados a decade following the abolition of the slave trade, planters had no choice but to import food in order to continue growing cane.[74]

Interruptions to this system of food access could- and did- have grave consequences for the most vulnerable populations on the island. Under turbulent circumstances, the planter class used its economic, political, and social positionality in Barbados to offload the impact of food insecurity on enslaved communities. The reliance on imports from overseas placed the fate of the island's food landscape on external circumstances at times. For example, in the late eighteenth

[72] Barbadian Blue Books, 1839-1872, 73235C-01, 498, Caribbean Colonial Statistics from the British Empire, 1824-1950, British Online Archives, London, https://britishonlinearchives.com/collections/73/volumes/498/barbados-1839-1947.

[73] Jerome S. Handler, "Plantation Slave Settlements in Barbados, 1650s to 1834" in *In the Shadow of the Plantation*, edited by The University of the West Indies, 122-161. Randle Publishers, 2002, 152.

[74] Higman, *Slave Populations British Caribbean,* 413.

century the American revolution resulted in a near halt in the arrival of food supplies from the United States, to the great detriment of enslaved Barbadians.[75]Import interruptions were certainly inconvenient for planters who may have had to eat or ration crops they would otherwise sell or face higher prices at local markets. But what was a mere economic inconvenience to the plantocracy, rippled into hunger and scarcity for enslaved communities. Afro-Barbadians felt the effects of conflicts thousands of miles away, as they found their rations lightened and altered, and the prices of market goods skyrocketed. The American Revolutionary War resulted in the deaths of thousands of enslaved laborers across the British West Indies as planters slashed rations and left those unable to afford survival to starve.[76]In fact, the loss of life that resulted in the region from the war moved the plantocracy across the West Indies to allocate more land to growing provisions in effort to decrease reliance on imported foodstuff.[77]Of course, this move was economically motivated, with planters figuring a decrease in cane lands was less financially burdensome than losing laborers.

The final decades of slavery therefore illustrate the capacity for the planter class to manipulate the food system in accordance with their own interests. Given planters' use of food as both a means to increase profits and as a weapon of control over laborers, the plantocracy certainly understood the extent to which they could mobilize food in their favor. So as emancipation was solidified into a certain future reality, and Barbadian planters searched for strategies of control that could keep their exploitative systems in place even without legal authority over laborers, they turned to their already established control over land and food.

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[75]Stephanie Bergman & Frederick H. Smith, "Blurring Disciplinary Boundaries: The Material Culture of Improvement during the Age of Abolition in Barbados" *Slavery and Abolition,* 2014 35(no.3), [418-436], p.419

[76]Higman, *Slave Populations British Caribbean,* 204.

[77] Higman, 204.

Land and Power in Emancipation

Abolition, Apprenticeship, Emancipation

In 1833 the Barbados legislature passed the first legislative act beginning the process of emancipation. The Slavery and Abolition Act of 1833 declared that on August 1, 1834 the institution of slavery would be terminated, yet not everyone would be declared "free." In addition to negotiating payments from the Colonial Office to "compensate" planters for their loss of "property," planters across the West Indies established a transitional system called the Apprenticeship System. Apart from children under six years of age and those who were too old, sick, or disabled to labor, 66,925 of the previously 83,150 enslaved laborers in Barbados became "Apprentices".[78]Apprenticeship kept formerly enslaved laborers tied to the same plantations and was essentially an extension of slavery, as laborers were forced to continue plantation labor and endured punishments and restrictions from the estate. Initially intended to span six years, the legislature prematurely terminated the system two years early due to pressure from Britain to advance emancipation due to reports of apprenticeship's striking similarity to slavery. On August 1, 1838, apprenticeship came to an end, and all Afro-Barbadians were officially declared free subjects of the British Crown.[79] Contrary to the fears of the planter class, and to the dismay of the newly freed, this transition did not lead to a mass exodus from the plantations. This outcome was due to the planter elite's preemptive efforts to implement a new labor system through legislative means in the same year, thereby maintaining control over the labor force despite the formal end of slavery.

[78] Beckles, *Great House Rules,* 34.

[79]Barbados. "Laws of Barbados: [1648-1874]" 1875. William Clowes and Sons, London. Harvard University. 24019077.

Barbadian planters prepared for full emancipation with an evaluation of their available resources and sources of power. Land first gained its power in Barbados from the creation of the plantation system. Through the exploitation of the land and enslaved labor, Barbadian planters had been extracting wealth from the plantation system since the seventeenth century. The more land a planter owned, the larger the operation, and that meant larger profits. The ideology of land ownership underscored the plantation system. Plantation owners, who sometimes resided in England themselves, profited the most from their operations while those white Barbadians working on the plantations as managers or drivers saw a much lesser financial gain.[80]In this sense, land ownership was tied to economic gain and was therefore linked to power in British colonial society. It was against this backdrop of land ownership and property value, that the plantocracy aimed to control laboring populations in post-emancipation.

Planters' monopoly over the legislature enabled them to pass acts that would maintain elements of slavery into emancipation; namely, coerced labor, limited mobility (both in the physical and socio-economic sense) and socio-political control. The plantocracy created and passed the 1838 Masters and Servants Act (also called "Contract Law") into legislation in effort to keep control over laborers following the end of apprenticeship. While most British West Indian islands were entering full emancipation for the first time, the British colonies of Antigua and Bermuda had been operating as fully freed colonies for four years, since they skipped the apprenticeship period.[81] This meant that Barbados could draw from the experience of these islands upon their own full emancipation. The legislature did exactly that when they adapted the Antiguan Contract Law, which had been designed (and was functioning) to keep free laborers

[80] Frederick William N. Bayley, *Four Years Residence in the West Indies,* (London: William Kidd, 1830), 80.

[81] Beckles, *A History of Barbados,* 93.

working on plantations.[82]The act asserted that if a laborer worked for an employer for five consecutive days, then that laborer was effectively hired under a one-year contract. The labor contract demanded the laborer "lend their services" to the planter for nine hours a day, five days a week. This provision instantly placed many apprentices under the contract upon the termination of the Apprentice System in 1838. As part of the contract, the planter would provide land on which the laborer could reside and cultivate.

Limited Land and Located Labor

The end of apprenticeship meant that all Black Barbadians were now "free" to pursue their own livelihoods. However, as apprenticeship had remained unpaid, few newly freed apprentices had the economic means to leave the plantation. For those who had accumulated some financial wealth, the limited amount of land posed the greatest issue for securing a life off the plantation. Large plantation projects dominated the island landscape, as 441 of the 508 estates in 1842, took up 81% of the total land area, giving planters a monopoly over the land.[83]The remaining available land was priced too high for what the majority of Afro-Barbadians could afford, but especially for laborers who were not freed prior to the end of apprenticeship. Not only was land in Barbados too expensive to be reasonably obtainable for the lower and middle classes, but it was the most expensive in the entirety of the British West Indies. In the 1840s, Antigua had the second highest freehold land prices in the British Caribbean at £40 to £80 per acre while an acre plot in Barbados ran £60 to £200.[84]The price was not just reflective of the dense population and small area of the island which rendered land scarce, but of the relative stability of post-

[82] Beckles, *Great House Rules,* 70.

[83] Beckles, *Great House Rules* 80.

[84] Nigel Bolland, "Systems of Domination after Slavery: the control of land and labor in the British West Indies after 1838" *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 23, no.4(1981): 598.

emancipation sugar production on the island in comparison to other colonies in the region. Furthermore, the competition for and renowned value of land in Barbados meant that the land plots that were available for sale were most often the least suitable for agricultural production, frequently located in mountainous or rocky areas.[85]

Without the ability to purchase land, the recently freed apprentices had few available options through which to survive. The high price and scarcity of land in Barbados was a principal limiting factor in the options available to laborers, which distinguished the colony from other islands. Greville John Chester, a British man visiting Barbados, recorded in his 1869 journal that on other islands "where there exists almost unlimited room for squatters, habits of great idleness were speedily engendered amongst the lately-freed slaves."[86] In his account, the ability for formerly enslaved laborers to escape the plantocracy in its totality was possible on other islands, such as Jamaica, where Afro-Caribbean people were "able to support life by merely scratching up the ground for a crop of yams or plantains [with no] inducement to labour."[87]Chester's description reveals that despite "emancipation" the perceived value of Afro-Caribbean laborers by the white elites remained tied to their ability to contribute to the plantocracy. Chester reduced the vigorous work needed to cultivate yams to "scratching up the ground" and further minimized this work through his claims of idleness and lack of inducement to "labor." This language underscores the colonial definition of "labor" as reserved for work that benefitted the plantation economy and further demonstrates the unwillingness of the planter class

[85] Remarkably, the rocky land plots that were thought to be useless by whites and were therefore sold at lower prices often to Afro-Barbadians, were transformed into viable agricultural lands through the tedious task of breaking up the rocks until a soil was formed. For more on this practice see: John Davy's *The West Indies Before and Since Slave Emancipation* p.91

[86]Greville John Chester, *Transatlantic sketches: In the West Indies, South America, Canada and the United States*. (London: Smith, Elder & Co, 1869), 64.

[87] Chester, *Transatlantic Sketches,* 64.

to accept laborers right to freedom. Yet even in face of planters' desire for continued control, the geographic and demographic circumstances that left land untouched by the plantation system, gave formerly enslaved Black laborers the opportunity to escape the plantation and the formal economy through what has been called a "reconstituted peasantry."[88] Afro-Caribbean laborers used the agricultural knowledge they developed under slavery to carve out subsistence-based lifestyles that did not rely on wages and therefore existed outside of the plantation economy and by extension, planter control. The threat this posed to the plantocracy is evident in the negative perspective communicated in Chester's journal.

However, the Barbadian planters hardly felt such fears as the limited land in Barbados meant "there [was] no bush or virgin soil or fall back upon, almost every inch of available soil [was] under cultivation, and the demand for labour [was] consequently great."[89]By the end of apprenticeship, of the 106,470 acres of land on the island, 100,000 were under some kind of cultivation.[90]With less than 7,000 acres of land not under cultivation, the residencies of the almost 100,000 Barbadians, the roads and urban centers, and other infrastructure likely further strained the capacity for Afro-Barbadians to find land suitable for squatting. By 1844 there was an average of 734.8 individuals per square mile on the island, the overwhelming majority being Afro-Barbadians.[91] In Jamaica, this ratio was much lower at only 86 persons per square mile. Therefore, even if socio-economic barriers had allowed Barbadian laborers to purchase land, the

[88] Mintz, Sidney W, Woodville K Marshall, Mary Karasch, and Richard Frucht. "Slavery and the Rise of Peasantries [with Commentary]." Historical Reflections 6, no. 1 (1979): 243.

[89] Chester, *Transatlantic Sketches,* 64.

[90] John Davy, *The West Indies, before and since Slave Emancipation* (Library of Princeton University, 1854), 108.

[91] Dawn P. Harris, *Punishing the Black Body: Marking social and racial structures in Barbados and Jamaica, (*Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2017)*,* 94.

sheer density of the island's population would render access scarce. Without available land to subsist from, formerly enslaved Barbadians had to depend on waged labor to purchase food, or work as field labors under located labor in order to access a small plot of rented land.

Employment Opportunities and Migration

Securing employment off the plantation was not viable for many formerly enslaved laborers who had the disadvantage of lacking access to waged labor prior to 1838 and often did not have any skills in trades or access to education.[92]Options for wages outside of the plantation were gendered, competitive, and required training in a profession and some amount of money up front. The legislature required Afro-Barbadians aiming to take other employment opportunities to pay for licenses and obtain permissions. These licenses were not only used as economic barriers to prevent praedials from leaving the plantation, but Bridgetown magistrates recorded the number of licenses they issued each year in order to ensure that the number of laborers accessing these professions remained limited.[93]These hurdles were intended to keep laborers reliant on agricultural labor.

Both intra and inter island migration occurred as freed laborers desperately attempted to escape the plantation labor that had become synonymous with their oppression. Intra-island migration was characterized by the move from the rural plantation to urban areas in search of trade work for men, huckstering (selling food at the market) or sex work for women, and domestic labor for both.[94]Because a certain amount of wealth was needed to receive licenses or training for these types of jobs, many laborers were not able to afford the payments or the

[92] Newton, *Children of Africa,* 228.

[93] Newton, *Children of Africa,* 234.

[94] Melanie Newton, "New Ideas of Correctness: Gender, amelioration and emancipation in Barbados, 1810s-50s," *Slavery and Abolition* 21, vol. 3(2000): 108. DOI: 10.1080/01440390008575322

trainings and even when they could, competition meant that jobs were scarcely available.[95] While some laborers did successfully abandon agricultural work, most were men who found work in the towns as grooms, coachmen, cooks, porters, etc. *The Barbadian* newspaper included a critique of this phenomenon in 1838 writing "[e]very day brings a fresh accession of these skulkers from the country to town."[96] The fact that women had fewer employment opportunities beyond fieldwork hindered their ability to migrate to urban areas to the same extent men could.

Due to the stiff competition for labor on the island, some Afro-Barbadians turned to inter-island emigration to find labor and land where they were more likely to be available. The plantocracy in Barbados identified migration as a threat to the labor supply early in apprenticeship and responded through legislating barriers to emigration. "An Act to Regulate the Emigration of Labourers from [Barbados]" passed in November of 1836, attempted to limit laborer emigration by restricting non-Barbadian employers recruitment of Barbadian laborers, and fining laborers who attempted to "decoy or entice away any child under sixteen years of age."[97] The act placed restrictions on members of the agricultural class, but interestingly left emigration unregulated for paupers and nonagricultural workers, since the colony viewed these urban Afro-Barbadian groups as both competition to the white merchant class and "a threat to public order".[98] Some Afro-Barbadian praedial men made claims that they were tradesmen to gain access to immigration, until another act was passed in response in 1839 prohibiting skilled tradesmen under the age of 21 from emigrating as well. Another anti-emigration act passed in

[95] Newton, "New Ideas of Correctness," 108-109.

[96] As cited in Newton, *The Children of Africa,* 233.

[97] Harris, *Punishing the Black Body,* 95.

[98] Newton, *Children of Africa,* 228.

1839 required potential emigrants to obtain permission from both the churchwarden and the magistrate to leave the colony, and prove that they would leave no young, elderly, or infirm family members behind.[99] These provisions prevented the majority of Afro-Barbadians from access to legal emigration, even for those who were nonagricultural laborers. Therefore, the legislative power of the plantocracy passed measures that limited the mobility of Afro-Barbadians with the clear intention of keeping a high labor-land workforce.

When the possibility to emigrate was presented to laborers, it was typically through illegal channels which posed grave risks. The continued system of slavery in Spanish colonies and in the United States presented a challenge for Black laborers looking to find work elsewhere. In Rachel Wilson Moore's journal (1863-64) she recollects a story told to her by a magistrate in which a large group of Afro-Barbadians signed labor contracts upon departing on a foreign ship, which to the horror of their families, was revealed to have been a trick to resell them into slavery in Cuba.[100] The fact that laborers were willing to leave their families and the familiarity of the island behind in order to find work, demonstrates the lack of fruitful options available to formerly enslaved communities upon emancipation. Laborers' risk-taking in signing labor contracts they could not read themselves, even following cases of re-enslavement of free Barbadians overseas, illustrates that laborers truly saw no hope for their socio-economic success in Barbados. Furthermore, the idea that laborers had a better chance of accessing land and higher wages elsewhere in the Caribbean, situates Barbados as unique in the post-emancipation context.

[99] Newton, *The Children of Africa,* 238.

[100] Rachel Wilson Moore, John Wilson Moore, and George Truman. *Journal of Rachel Wilson Moore, kept during a tour to the West Indies and South America, in 1863-64 : with notes from the diary of her husband : together with his memoir*, (Philadelphia: T.E. Zell, 1867,) Archives of Latin American and Caribbean History, Sixteenth to Twentieth Century, 189.

Therefore, with few other options to secure wages and/or land, many formerly enslaved laborers remained on the plantation as located laborers. With various constraints on physical and socioeconomic mobility, the contract was the only viable option for most agricultural laborers. The 'advantage' of these positions was the plot that accompanied the contract. Afro-Barbadians, especially women, continued to maximize the efficiency of the use of these plots in order to survive the realities of emancipation under which many were starving, without shelter or access to land. For unemployed Barbadians living in destitution, a located labor contract was desirable for its provided access to housing, wages, and land. Essentially, a labor contract was in many cases the difference between starvation and destitution, and survival.

Contract Law: Planter Power

In addition to linking labor to access to land, the Contract Law reinscribed some of the socio-political power planters had lost over their laborers as emancipated workers. For example, while either party could terminate the contract given a one month's notice, the consequences for the laborer varied based on who ended the contract. If the planter ended the contract, the laborer had one month to vacate, their crops would be appraised for value by a Justice of the Peace and the worker would be paid this determined value.[101] But if a laborer ended the contract themselves, they had one month to gather their belongings and leave their land and home, without taking or selling the crops in the ground. The differentiation in consequences for the laborer underscore how power dynamics were maintained into emancipation, given that laborers were punished for making the decision to leave their job positions.

Even the clauses of the act that appeared to protect laborers from exploitation, were overshadowed by the lack of consequences for planters who broke the new laws of

[101] Beckles, *Great House Rules*, 70.

emancipation. While legal clauses were continually used to justify the prosecution and ejectment of located laborers, most planters were either never prosecuted or punished very lightly for illegal acts taken against the laboring population.[102] The appraisal system is one example of planter power blurring the lines between law and practice. Contract Law required that located laborers receive compensation for their crops if evicted by their employer, which indicates that laborers owned the rights to the products of their rented plots. But the extent to which laboring women could actually express ownership over their grown goods was not as simple as the appraisement system suggests. In at least one recorded case, located laboring women were evicted for refusing to follow planters' orders regarding the management of their crops on their rented plots.[103]So, while women may have owned the rights to the crops, they were not free to do what they pleased with them without fear of eviction. Even upon eviction, where the system would seem to fairly compensate women for their crops, the biases of magistrates lessened the payments given for appraisals. The bias was so obvious at times, that even police magistrates themselves recognized the obvious inequities in the appraisal system:

> I would suggest that in cases of appraisement there should always be two special magistrates and one general magistrate (the law now ordains there shall be two general magistrates and one special). The consequence is obvious; the planter is always a general magistrate, and of course has it all his own way, as one dissentient voice goes for nought.[104]

Unfair appraisements were certainly numerous, as several cases of appraisal disputes made their way to the Court of Appeals throughout the initial decades of located labor. In most of these cases, the payments received for crop appraisals were found by the Courts to be insufficient and

[102] Harris, *Punishing the Black Body,* 44-45.

[103] Beckles, *Great House Rules,* 88-89. The case of Betsy Cleaver, a located laborer evicted for selling her sugarcane against the estate managers wishes, is covered in chapter five.

[104] Barbados, 1836, Despatches, Offices and Individuals, CO28/118, The National Archives, London, England, Enclosure no. 615.

payment was ordered to be made to the laborer.[105]These cases likely represent only a marginal sample of this phenomenon, and highlight the differences between legislative clauses and the actual actions taken by planters. By sending a few of these cases through the court, the Barbadian white elite could demonstrate to the Colonial Office that they were combatting planter reluctance to accept new emancipation systems, through a system of justice that permitted laborers to use the law for their own protection. However, these cases were likely more performative than realistic, and most laborers continued to be subjected to illegal appraisements, evictions, and punishments without ever having a case filed, let alone heard. In this way, located labor appeared to give laborers more autonomy over their crops than was often given in practice.

Planters retained socio-political control over their workers under the law, as they inscribed the right to evict laborers from both their cottage and the plantation without compensation and to imprison them if they took action that the planter considered 'insubordinate.' Planters also included a provision that called for imprisonment of laborers for gambling, using inappropriate language, or organizing in an illegal manner. These provisions not only granted planter social and punitive control over the laborers under contract but also established the right for planters to hire private police forces for their estates to carry out punishment.[106]

Although the Colonial Office initially rejected the 1838 law for concerns around the limits placed on freedom, the law was only briefly revised before Parliament approved it in 1840, solidifying the located labor system.[107]The name "located labor" reflects the way the act married

[105] Barbados, 1840, Despatches: Proceedings before the Court of Appeal, CO28/136, The National Archives, London, England, 78.

[106] Barbados. "Laws of Barbados"

[107] Beckles, *Great House Rules,* 71-72.

the role of employer and landlord for planters and affirmed that access to land and housing would be tied to plantation labor and subordination to planter request. While emancipation had effectively removed the responsibility of planters to ensure the survival of the laboring classes, turning this role to the state, the 1840 Contract Law restored some of the power and control over laborers that had been lost in this transition. Planters were no longer incentivized to provide their employees with adequate access to provisions and medicines, but they now retained the right to enforce behavior under the threat of what they did allocate: land.

Therefore, the located labor system effectively tied access to land to agricultural labor, as enforced at the individual level. While under slavery and apprenticeship, any person living in the slave village, including children, elderly, and infirm enslaved people, had access to the 'Negro gardens.' But emancipation removed the rights to these grounds for the formerly enslaved, instead linking access to land as contingent on individual work performance. In doing so, the located labor system created competition between agricultural laborers, allocating land to only those were able and willing to provide work for the estate. With the high population-land ratio, even these marginalized labor positions could be regarded as valuable, as those unable to secure a contract found themselves without land, food, or shelter to survive. Therefore, planter's success in keeping laborers on plantations was dependent on the limited amount of land and the confinement of a high number of laborers.

Food Systems in Emancipation: Food and Power

Planters' utilization of their land monopoly to keep laborers tied to plantations has been consistently cited in the historiography as the principal condition under which planters maintained control in Barbados following abolition. However, the direct link between the located labor system and the manipulation and control of the food system is given less attention in

emancipation scholarship, despite food's leading role in shaping this era in Barbadian history. The elimination of food rations on many estates post-1838, forced laborers to provision themselves from their small plots and meager wages alone. The law no longer mandated that estates provide weekly or daily food supplies for laborers once they were declared free, and so rations were largely eliminated. The plantocracy then took steps to dictate the amount of food on the island upon full emancipation, in effort to "substitute the pain of an empty stomach for the pain of the whip."[108]

Food as Control: manufactured scarcity

While land was a fixed resource of which the plantocracy could establish a firm hold over via ownership, food was not as easy to control. For Afro-Barbadians who could afford to purchase their food, land was not needed to survive. For this reason, planters sought to maintain a relatively scarce and expensive food system on the island, in order to keep the recently freed population reliant on located labor contracts for survival. It was under this context that the plantocracy willfully crafted food shortages to starve laborers into plantation field labor out of desperation. At the dawn of full emancipation in 1838, in a panicked, and infuriated response, several planters across the island quite literally ripped premature crops of out the provision grounds.[109]The strategy was to stunt the local food supply, raise food prices, and force formerly enslaved Afro-Barbadians to return to agricultural labor with no other choice.

[108] James Stephen to the Rev'd A. M. Campbell, November 28, 1832, Records of the Society for the Propogation of the Gospel, Rhodes House Library, Oxford University, C/WIN/BAR/5, C/COD/unnumbered. As cited by: Katherine Paugh, *The Politics of Reproduction: Race, Medicine, and Fertility in the Age of Abolition,* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), 229.

[109] Barbados, Jan-Aug 1839, Despatches: Apprentices Part I, Governor Sir C. T. M. Macgregor, 2 November, 1838-25 November, 1839, CO28/130, The National Archives, London, England.

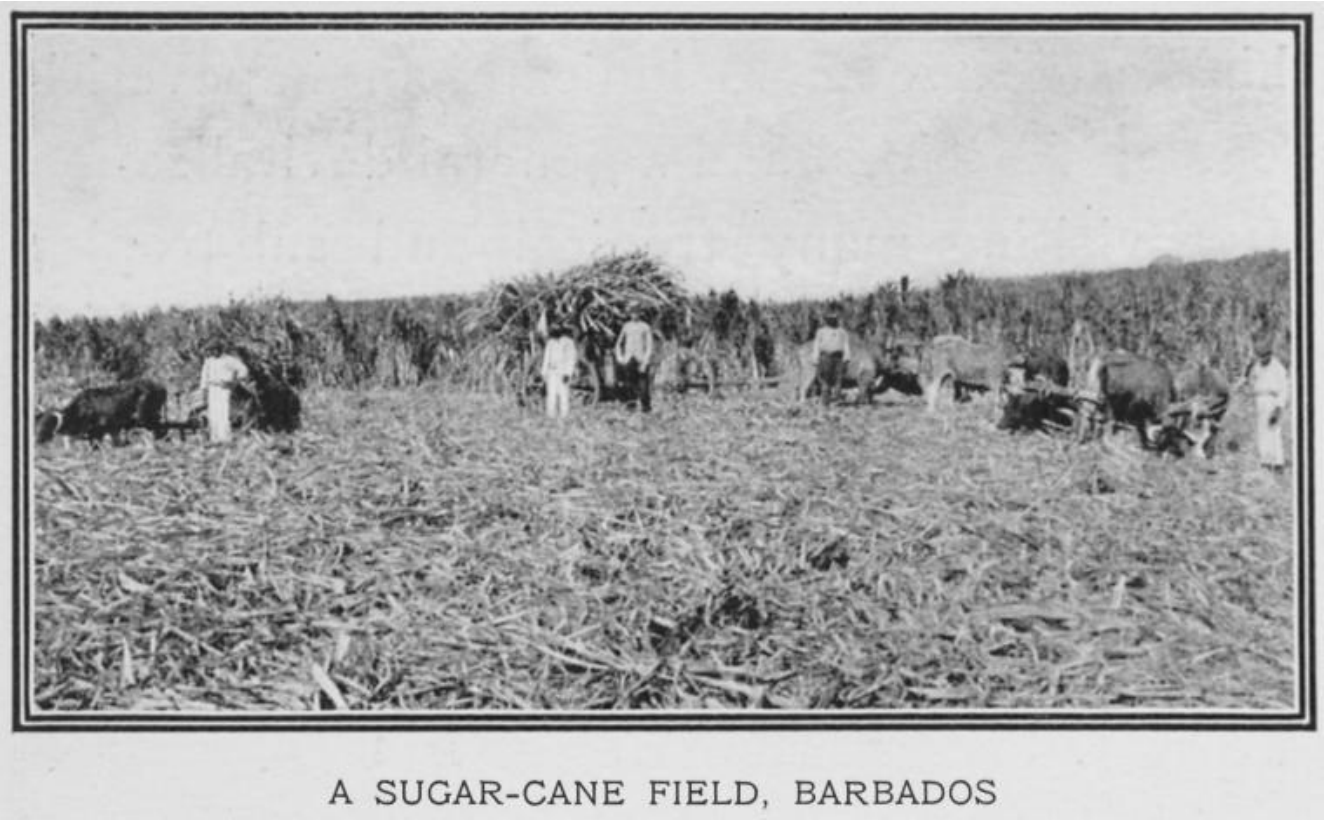


Fig 3. "A sugar-cane field, Barbados." Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, Jean Blackwell Hutson Research and Reference Division, The New York Public Library. New York Public Library Digital Collections. https://digitalcollections.nypl.org/items/71c9d160-c624-012f-09e6-58d385a7bc34

Planter fear not only took the provision crops out of the ground but also prevented the planting of these crops to the same extent as was done under slavery. Despite the allowances received from Britain as compensation for their laborers, most planters remained panicked that they could not economically survive the transition to emancipation. Desperate to increase profits under the new system, many estates cut back on the land normally allotted to provisions, and increased instead the land cultivated with canes. The idea was that in increasing the production of canes, planters could offset the wages they were now obligated to pay laborers. Of course, the reduction in provision grounds greatly reduced the amount of staple crops on which the island subsisted.[110]

[110] Barbados, Jan-Aug 1839, CO28/130.

Laborers also shifted the cultivation of their plots in the initial moments of emancipation, as they eagerly planted sugarcane for the first time on their own accounts. Although the rights of access to the 'Negro Gardens' shifted from slavery to located labor, most able-bodied agricultural laborers maintained at least a quarter an acre of land for their own provisioning under the new system. Prior to emancipation, extra provisions from these plots increased nutrition and calories, added variety to the enslaved diet, and provided some monetary income. And while most laborers continued to grow pigeon peas, potatoes, beans, plantains, eddoes, and other crops on these lands, there was a great reduction in these crops for the planting of cane.[111]As the principal export of the island, and the money maker for the higher classes, formerly enslaved labourers turned to planting the crop they had spent their lives cultivating. Between the increased reliance on the wage for the laboring classes and the access to the market for export, planting canes became a principal crop on located laborer's plots. In moving their grounds into cane cultivation, laborers sacrificed land that may have previously been planted in provisions, therefore contributing to the decrease in the production of local consumable foods on plantations.

The consequence for the island was increased reliance on imported goods, as local provisions became scarcer and more inhabitants received wages to spend at the market. The reliance on specifically American imports was well understood by magistrates who reported their anxieties surrounding the dependency. One Bridgetown magistrate recorded in his 1839 report, "should there be unfortunately any outbreak with America, there is no doubt the lower Classes of

[111] Barbados, 1840, Despatches: Proceedings before the Court of Appeal, CO28/136, The National Archives, London, England.

the Community will starve in common with others from want of provisions,"[112]and another reported in 1840, "was it not for the supply we receive from America, the consequence would be awful."[113]Despite that awareness of the drastic decrease in planted provisions from years past, the plantocracy maintained the stance that the scarcity would be beneficial to their want of continued control over the formerly enslaved population. One magistrate admitted quite plainly to the strategy: "A sudden and excessive importation of food would at once create an ample cause of increase to that idleness which is now too frequently met with among our Laborers at a moment too when their labor is so much needed, as such opportunities afforded them for adding to the account of their daily wages, by a little increase to their daily labor."[114] Increasing the supply would drive down the cost in the market and consequently make imported produce more financially obtainable. The laborer would then be able to purchase this food with the money they received from waged work and exported canes from their rented plots. Meanwhile, the planter's provisions would decrease in their value and threaten the leverage created by the scarcity. So, at the same time local provisions greatly decreased, the planter class willingly rejected increasing imports in effort to maintain the scarcity of food on the island.

Food Shortage Consequences

The decrease in local and imported provisions on the island created a trickle-down effect that disrupted the entire Barbadian food system. In the final decades of slavery, enslaved communities held a considerable number of chickens, goats, and pigs, and to a lesser extent, cows, sheep, and horses. The corn and roots allocated from provision grounds as well as any

[112] Barbados, Jan-Aug 1839, CO28/130, Enclosure no. 115.

[113] Barbados, Apr 1839- Mar 1840, Despatches: Apprentices, CO28/131, The National Archives, London, England, Enclosure no. 2.

[114] Barbados, Jan-Aug 1839, CO28/130, Enclosure no. 115.

grown in the Negro Garden was used to feed these animals.[115]But upon emancipation's eradication of rations across most estates and the general decrease of available provisions on the island, free laborers struggled to feed their animals as they reserved the little food supplies available for themselves. The lack of access to plantation rations therefore shifted the types of animals it was possible for laborers to keep. Goats and cattle increased dramatically across laborer lands given these animals' ability to subsist from grasses and pasturage.[116]This shift in animal demographics on the island is another example of planter actions having ripple effects for laboring communities, and the strategic responses of laborers in face of changing agricultural landscapes and resource fluctuations.

Planters also directly interfered with laborers' ability to keep animals. While the changes in rations at the end of apprenticeship indirectly dropped animal holdings, the number of animals on plantations began decreasing two years prior to 1838 due to planters outright banning the keeping of stock for laborers. With emancipation on the doorstep, planters likely saw laborers' animals as investments capable of advancing their positions in society once fully free. In line with other policies from this period that intended to weaken the laboring classes, one police magistrate shared that "some proprietors do withhold former indulgences from the apprentices, some even say as far as to forbid their even keeping feathered stock."[117]

The reduction in laborers' stock that resulted from planter bans and reduced or removed rations affected the availability of foods for all classes. Laborers did not often consume their

[115] Barbados, Jan-Aug 1839, Despatches: Apprentices Part I, Governor Sir C. T. M. Macgregor, 2 November, 1838-25 November, 1839, CO28/130, The National Archives, London, England, Enclosure no.41.

[116] Barbados, Jan-Aug 1839, CO28/130, Enclosure no.41.

[117] Barbados, 1836, Despatches, Offices and Individuals, CO28/118, The National Archives, London, England, Enclosure no. 615.

animals themselves but instead sold them at the market to higher classes.[118] With fewer animals in the market, demand for meat and other animal products was strained. Those affluent enough to regularly purchase animal proteins would have turned to imported products, further increasing reliance on external food sources. The dynamic of both importing and producing locally was therefore the key to planter manipulation of the food system, given the capacity for wealthier classes to adapt to local shortages while the laboring classes absorbed the brunt of the insecurity.

Foodstuffs, from crops to animals, therefore, were central to the plantocracy's preservation of power into emancipation. The preceding examples of planter interference in the Barbadian food system illustrate how control was maintained by this class through manufactured scarcity. From destroying crops, to reducing rations, and banning the keeping of animals, planters sought to reduce laborers to a state of hunger in which they would be desperate to resolve. Planters then 'sold' the cure to the manufactured crisis: food and land, in exchange for the plantation field work laborers were so hopeful to abandon. The designed scarcity of food likewise increased the importance of land for laboring populations, who faced even higher prices at the market when looking to purchase imported foods and consequently had to rely more heavily on their own production. So, while land played a key role in the continuation of the plantocracy into emancipation, food was equally important in the story of how power was exercised.

Access to Land: From Communal to Individual

The shift to the located labor system transformed the arrangement and access to land for laboring communities whose communal garden space became linked to individual land holdings. In the 'Negro Villages,' enslaved communities were permitted to erect houses in whatever

[118] Handler & Wallman, "Production Activities," 454.

manner they pleased given that "most slave villages remained internally-ordered communities in which the planters rarely intervened."[119] White observers of these villages often described them as having a "haphazard and non-geometrical arrangement of houses,"[120] from which, as Jerome Handler has argued, suggests that "slaves were not following European practice, but rather their own cultural notions of arranging space: these notions were probably shaped by African practices."[121] The organization of residential space is deeply tied to familial structures in West Africa, making it likely that villages were configured around kinship ties.

But the located labor system moved the center of Afro-Barbadian agricultural space, the "Negro gardens," from the village to a system of individual land holdings. Rather than laborers sharing the communal space of the village to grow provisions, hold livestock and cultivate dense food forests, the provisioning plot became tied to individual performance and employment. This key shift took the space of the 'Negro garden' and the surrounding village and divided the structure in which laborers lived on plantations into a more Eurocentric arrangement. In doing so, the plot moved from a site of communal cultivation to a piece of individual 'privilege' tied to the plantation's measure of worthiness. This shift made the relationship between land, food, and plantation not only interconnected, but individual. No longer could laborers rely on the space of the communal village and gardens to ensure a site of community care. At least on paper, the system would suggest that food and land became more individual and family oriented than communal.

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[119] Higman, *Slave Populations,* 221, as quoted in Jerome S. Handler, "Plantation Slave Settlements in Barbados, 1650s to 1834" in *In the Shadow of the Plantation,* ed. The University of the West Indies (Randle Publishers, 2002), 122-161, 129.

[120] Handler, "Plantation Slave Settlements," 129.

[121] Handler, "Plantation Slave Settlements," 130.

The dissolving of the 'Negro villages' and 'Negro gardens' into individual houses tied to 1/8 to ½ acre plots was not sudden but gradually became more common following the onset of the Contract Law in 1840. In many ways the new located labor system did in fact make land and by extension, food, the manner in which estates established control over freed laboring women and more specifically, their labor. Located laboring women, especially single mothers, or women with other dependents, relied on their rented plots of land to feed themselves and their families. When planters evicted women for missing work, 'insubordination,' or other accusations of dissatisfaction on the part of the planter, she could lose her only source of income, food, and shelter under the Contract Law. This therefore directly weaponized access to food and land through tying these resources to labor and obedience.

Despite the located labor system's structural individualization of laborer's relationship to work, land, and food, women retained strategies of communal cultivation and land organization throughout the geographical dissolution of the villages. In laborer testimonies from an 1839 case in the Court of Appeal, the tension between land, property, and crops as both communal and individual. In the case, two neighbors, both located laborers, quarrel over the planting of the space dividing their planted plots. Matthew Terrill's account states that, "while he was planting some beans, he was interrupted by the Defendant, Hannah Green, telling him not to plant so low down, but to leave room for her to hang her clothes on the Hedge."[122]This negotiation of a bordering space can be understood as a communal approach to spatial organization and community planning, perhaps a common debate within villages. However, Hannah's request was

[122] Barbados, 1836, Despatches, Offices and Individuals, CO28/118, The National Archives, London, England, p.180.

not answered with a withdrawal of the beans from Matthew, who according to his account, "continued planting." To this, Hannah responded by chopping down a 'pawpaw' tree on Matthew's property, therefore sparking the case which has been filed against her. Both Matthew's refusal to stop planting his beans and the ruling of the court for Hannah to compensate Matthew for the cut tree, are reflections of an increasingly individual conceptualization of property rights and claims to land that emerged in response to the legislation in the Contract Law.

Of course, this is not to over-simply the dynamic of the 'Negro garden' and village as strictly communal and shared spaces. Given the importance of food crops as valuable resources for both consumption and sale, enslaved Afro-Barbadians managed crops grown in the 'Negro gardens' through systems of ownership and allocation that may have been similar to those used by white planters in Barbados. However, different kinship patterns, cultural beliefs, and African practices could have shaped how food and land were distributed within the villages themselves. It is difficult to say with certainty the degree to which laborer's own conceptualization of the rights to land and food became more individual in the transition to the located labor system. However, it is clear that the legislation of the Contract Law moved the enforcement of plantation labor from one of legal ownership of bodies, to one of control over food and land.

Conclusion

Planter's monopoly over land holdings in Barbados strained the possibilities for formerly enslaved women to independently acquire land, forcing these women to accept labor contracts to support themselves. While located laborers had access to land, they could not dedicate adequate time to cultivating it given the nine-hour work days their contracts required. The legislative, social, and economic power held by planters permitted this class to manipulate land and food

systems to keep laboring classes dependent on plantation labor for survival.[123] Therefore, the system of located labor paired with the manufactured scarcity in the island food system rendered land and food some of the most powerful resources in emancipation-era Barbados.

But planter's decisions to utilize these resources as tools of control, ultimately gave food and land more value in emancipation society, which could prove advantageous to laborers who were able to acquire these resources. These resources therefore stood as both hegemonic and as counter-hegemonic tools, with the planter class weaponizing control and laboring classes mobilizing what little access they had. The sheer scale on which the plantocracy benefited from their power over food and land following abolition can overshadow the extent to which laboring women were able to use these same resources to advance their own visions of emancipation. An explicit focus on the ways in which formerly enslaved women mobilized these two interconnected resources under the located labor system pushes back against the lens that food and land were solely used as tools of oppression against laboring classes. From an inversion of perspective of power via food and land from the planter to the laboring woman, we can bring into light the strategies of survival, community, adaptation, and perseverance that these women employed in navigating their positions under the plantocracy.

[123] Christine Barrow. "Ownership and Control of Resources in Barbados: 1834 to the Present," *Social and Economic Studies* 32, no.3(1983): 86.

III. Plantation and Plot

On August 1, 1841, exactly three years after full emancipation in Barbados, two located laborers brought a case of unfair appraisal to the Court of Appeal. The laborers, John Williams and Credjoe, had been ejected from their positions on the estate and under Contract Law, were entitled to compensation for the crops growing on their rented plots. But when the crops were appraised by the estate's planter, Mr. Maycock, instead of three freeholder magistrates, the two men appealed the appraisal as unlawful. The court responded with a renewed appraisal of the laborers' lands, and by extensions detailed the contents of these otherwise unmonitored spaces into the colonial archive. The resulting appraisals, as seen in figure 4, illustrate the intensive and diverse cultivation of rented plots.[124]

John Williams' Crop	
225 lbs Potatoes @ $1.20	$ 2.80
75 Plantain Trees @ 15 Cents each	$ 5.25
50 holes Cassava @	$ 0.80
2 spots of Canes	$15.00
Pea Trees and Guinea Corn	$ 1.00
Eddoes	$ 0.75
Holing a spot of Land	$ 0.30
Total	$25.90
Cudjoe's Crop	
700 holes canes (for plants)	$ 3.00
700 lbs potatoes @ 1.20	$ 8.40
Guinea Corn and Peas	$ 0.60
Plantains	$ 1.00
Total	$13.00

Figure 4. Plot Appraisals for John Williams and Cudjoe's rented plots. Barbados, 1841, Despatches: Proceedings before the Court Appeal, July 1840 - December 1841, CO28/141, The National Archives, London, England, 412.

[124] Barbados, 1841, Despatches: Proceedings before the Court Appeal, July 1840 - December 1841, CO28/141, The National Archives, London, England, 412-415.

The diversity expressed in these appraisals stands in stark contrast to the agricultural landscape of the plantation. Sylvia Wynter's 1971 article, "Novel and History, Plot and Plantation" suggested that the history of the Caribbean could be understood through the socioeconomic division of the plantation and the plot. Although "Wynter's insights on these spaces of history have been overlooked,"[125]this model provides a useful approach to Afro-Barbadian women's labor, especially for evaluating how they applied their labor to these spaces differently. Through a comparison of the labor formerly enslaved women performed for the estate and that which they exerted towards their own rented plots of land, it can be deduced that these women made selective decisions about how to best spend their time and energy despite the limited agency their positions permitted them.

Despite the categorization of agricultural labor as "unskilled" in contrast to trades and other forms of labor in Barbadian society, laborers possessed extensive knowledge about cultivation both on and off of the estate. Women spent a minimum of forty-five hours a week in monocultural fields working for the estate, in addition to whatever time they could find outside of this to cultivate dense multi-cropped gardens on their rented plots. Their participation in these two drastically different types of agriculture is testament to the extent and diversity of knowledge these "unskilled" laborers had. Women's small plots kept both themselves and their families fed in times of scarcity and in face of planter attempts to dispossess laborers of adequate food. But these spaces also facilitated cultural practices, permitting laborers to use traditional farming methods and produce culturally significant foods. Contrasting women's labor on the plantation

[125] Elizabeth DeLoughrey, "Yam, Roots, and Rot: Allegories of the Provision Grounds," *Small Axe* 15, no. 1(2011): 58.

and on the plot therefore reveals how they used access to land in tandem with their agricultural knowledge to maximize the benefits of their own time and energy.

Plantation Agriculture

The average located laboring woman would have spent the majority of her waking life in the monotonous fields of the estate, as their contracts required a minimum of 45 hours of labor each week. Despite the plantocracy's devaluation of agricultural labor as "unskilled," the work these women performed in these positions was neither intuitive nor easy. Afro-Barbadian's women's labor was the foundation of the sugar empire upon which planters reaped the profits. Without the physical and mental exertion of these women, planters would have been little more than landowners. The framing of this labor as 'unskilled' therefore erases the knowledge, physical exertion, and embodied expertise that laboring women had in cultivating plantation landscapes. An emphasis on this labor both brings to light the women responsible for the production of plantation commodities and situates this labor into their everyday lived experience.

Agricultural Seasons

Sugarcane cultivation was a year-long and constant task, since the plant took 18 months to come to harvest after planting. Estates had laborers plant baby canes at the end of the year from the months of October to December. Canes therefore were ready to harvest, for "crop season" beginning as early as February. Because of the extent of cultivation on the island, planting and harvesting seasons spanned months. The final canes of the season would not be harvested until the end of July into the start of August, marking the end of the crop season. Afro-Barbadians celebrated the end of the harvest with "crop-over," which was a celebration that included dancing, feasting, and West African traditions.[126] Field workers then planted the land in

[126] Edwina Ashie-Nikoi, "Cohobbloplot: Africanisms in Barbadian Culture through the Lens of Crop-Over," *The Journal of Caribbean History* 32, no.1(1998): 82-120.

provision crops which were designed to come to fruition quickly before the estate demanded that laborers plant the next round of canes, thereby starting the next season.[127]

Gendered Fieldwork and Gang Labor

It is undeniable that agricultural laboring women gained extensive knowledge of sugarcane and its cultivation through their positions as fieldworkers. Enslaved women consistently outnumbered their male counterparts in Barbados, with demographics between 1789 and the 1838 emancipation averaging a 52% female to 48% male enslaved population.[128] Gender demographics in Barbados were unique to the West Indies as women continued to outnumber men into the initial decades of emancipation. Women were therefore central to the production of sugar cane in Barbados throughout the nineteenth century, primarily in their roles as fieldworkers. While men working in sugar production most often took positions later in the process, as boilers and curers for example, women made up the majority of field laborers. This pattern persisted into the initial decades of emancipation. Labor was organized by 'gangs' which were ranked from first to third. Tasks were assigned to each gang depending on the level of physical exertion required. Able-bodied adult men and women worked in the first and second gangs which took the most strenuous tasks such as the 'cane-holing.'[129] The third gang, commonly called the 'hog-meat' gang or 'pot-gang' was typically comprised of children aging around 4-14, or the years in between which a child was deemed strong enough to work, but not

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[127] Barbados, Jan-Aug 1839, Despatches: Apprentices Part I, Governor Sir C. T. M. Macgregor, 2 November, 1838-25 November, 1839, CO28/130, The National Archives, London, England, 806.

[128] Todd Gregory Monahan, "The Whips and Scorns of Time: Slavery and the Environment in Colonial Barbados and Jamaica, 1789-1834," (an honors thesis: Rutgers University, New Brunswick, NJ, 1999).

[129] Cane-holing was a process of soil preparation for cane planting unique to Barbados. See page 72 for more. Tara A. Inniss, "From Slavery to Freedom: Children's Health in Barbados, 1832-1838," Slavery and *Abolition* 27, no.2(August 2006): 252. 10.1080/01440390600765672

strong enough to enter a first or second gang.[130] The name 'hog-meat' derived from the task assigned to the third gang of picking insects and grasses from the fields which were then fed to plantation livestock.[131] Women would move up from third gang to the first as they matured into adults, and then eventually reverse this progression as they aged, returning to the third gang in their elder years.[132]

Throughout the apprenticeship and into emancipation, the typical day in the cane field for formerly enslaved women would span around nine hours.[133] Under the located labor system, most estates expected this labor at least five days a week. Labor in the fields was often repetitive, with one task being performed over and over again based on the season of the crop. It was through these forced and coerced tasks that women acquired agricultural techniques of sugarcane cultivation.

Clearing

Before the soil could be prepared for the planting of the cane, the land had to first be cleared. By the nineteenth century, there were hardly any trees left on Barbados, as one English visitor to the island remarked, "What a red rag is to a bull, […] that a tree is to the Barbadian planter."[134] So, while women did not have to remove trees when prepping the land, they did have to cut grasses or reap crops depending on the condition of the needed plot. Guinea grass, a

[130] Innis, 252.

[131] Innis, 252.

[132] Maureen Elgersman Lee, "Remembering Our Mothers: Black Women, Slavery, and Maternal Power in Barbados and Jamaica," in *Shackled Sentiments: slaves, spirits, and memories in the African diaspora,* 41-56, (Lexington: Lexington Books, 2019), 48.

[133] Barbados, Apr 1839- Mar 1840, Despatches: Apprentices, CO28/131, The National Archives, London, England.
[134] John Chester Greville. *Transatlantic sketches: In the West Indies, South America, Canada and the United States. London*, (Smith, Elder & Co, 1869), 97.

grass commonly used for fodder in Africa, spread quickly as a 9ft tall invasive species in the Caribbean.[135] Another fast-spreading fodder grass, commonly called sour grass in the West Indies, also populated many plots across Barbados.[136] Initially grown to feed livestock, these grasses quickly invaded any open soil they could find and consequently needed frequent harvesting. The same island visitor noted how he found it "strange that the labourers should be permitted to cling to their old knives in preference to scythes for the cutting of grass" noting that a recent experiment had found an Irish laborer able to cut Guinea grass with the scythe at a rate of sixty-three times that of the laborer with the knife.[137] This can be attributed to the tendency for planters to resist importing expensive new technologies, and to rely instead on the Afro-Caribbean labor force to provide the energy needed for the simpler tools.

Despite planter resistance to ease this process with the importation of the scythe, women found strategies to maximize their use of the hoe. After clearing the land, the soil had to be prepared. Women found that using their hoes to cut the grass, rather than their knives, could begin the preparation of the soil. An Englishmen comparing Barbadian cultivation to that which he had seen in Europe found that the hoe has "rather the preference over the knife in the instance of sour grass; because when using it, the ground is broken and moved a little at the same time that the grass is cut."[138] Efficiency for women in agricultural positions then, could be manipulated to best advance their own interests. Cutting grass quickly had little advantage for the hourly laborer in contrast to the planter who wished the work to be done as soon as possible.

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[135] B K Simon and S W.L Jacobs, "Megathyrsus Maximus (Jacq.) B. K. Simon & S. W. L. Jacobs," IDseed, June 10, 2025, https://seedidguide.idseed.org/fact_sheets/megathyrsus-maximus-jacq-b-k-simon-s-w-l-jacobs/.

[136] John Davy, *The West Indies*, before and since Slave Emancipation (Library of Princeton University, 1854), 135.

[137] Chester, 96.

[138] Davy, *The West Indies*, 135.

By choosing to perform clearing with a hoe, laboring women rejected the urgency of their employers to clear land quickly, and yet simultaneously reduced the effort needed to fulfill their later tasks.

Entering the tilling phase with the soil already partially turned could permit women to exert less energy during tilling, without facing scrutiny from the estate manager for moving too slowly. Planters had expectations about how long tasks should take and being caught performing slow or unsatisfactory work could entail threats or punishment from employers.[139] By manipulating the cultivation process, women could save themselves valuable energy while still completing their tasks on time. This distinction demonstrates the ways in which women laboring in the fields found ways to deceptively manipulate their forced and coerced labor to reduce the strain it took on their bodies. By doing so, women could use more energy on their own rented plots.

Tilling and Weeding

Once the land was cleared, the soil had to be prepared for the planting of the cane. The soil in Barbados varied throughout the island and influenced land values based on planter perceptions of ability to grow crops.[140] To prepare the ground for cane planting, trenches were typically dug in organized rows. Despite the growing popularity of the plow for this purpose in Europe, plows remained relatively uncommon on this island leaving this work to be performed by the laborers themselves. "The old-fashioned hoe"[141] remained one of the key tools fueling the

[139] Joseph Sturge and Thomas Harvey, The West Indies in 1837; Being the Journal of a Visit to Antigua, Montserrat, Dominica, St. Lucia, Barbadoes, and Jamaica; Undertaken for the Purpose of Ascertaining the Actual Condition of the Negro Population of Those Islands, (London: Hamilton, Adams, and Co. 1838), 4.

[140] Janet Heshall Momsen, "The Marginalisation of Women Farmers: gender and small-scale agriculture in Barbados, 1838-1935," *Caribbean Geography* 6, no. 1(1995), 52-60.

[141] Chester, *Transatlantic Sketches West Indies,* 65.

profits of the sugar empire, at the hands of Afro-Barbadian women who saw little (if any) of the return.

The confusion of British visitors to the island who found the hoe significantly less productive than the plow, could be attributed to an unfamiliarity with cane planting in Barbados. While trenches were universally used across the West Indies for cane cultivation, the unique landscape of Barbados generated innovation to this tradition. Planters frequently battled sheet erosion and gullying due to the flat landscape and coral limestone makeup of the island. In what J.H. Galloway has considered a tactic to combat this water erosion, the technique of 'cane holing' became popular in lieu of the traditional trenching for cane cultivation.[142] Cane holing began with agricultural laborers dividing the field into dozens of 5x5ft square plots. Field workers then used their hoes to dig a hole in each square plot, averaging about 2x3 feet across and 5-6 inches deep. Laborers would then plant baby canes into the depression holes, packing them in with manure. The resulting checkerboard arrangement aided in water retention and reduced erosion and gullying that often occurred when trenches were used.[143] This technique was not universally implemented across the island, and may have been resorted to only under certain climatic conditions, for other sources record the use of the plow or the retention of trenches even in the absence of the plow.[144] However, 'cane holing' was a unique attribute of Barbadian sugar plantations that rested solely on the grueling labor of fieldworkers.

Women continued to use the hoe after canes were planted, primarily for weeding. As canes grew, they faced competition with other grasses and weeds who took the newly churned

[142] J.H. Galloway, *The Sugar Cane Industry: an historical geography from its origins to 1914* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989).

[143] Galloway, 100.

[144] Galloway, 101.

soil as their own. Some grasses grew rapidly in the humid and rainy conditions of the tropics, often to the great anxieties of the plantocracy's cash crops. Young cane plants were susceptible to being drowned out by these hungry grasses and so planters sent field gangs to weed the grasses out.[145] Hoes were again used for this task, but the use of them here had to be more precise. Women had to pay attention as they scraped out the grasses and their roots with the bladed hoe, for if they mistook a cane plant for a weed and pulled it out, or even mistakenly damaged a young cane, they faced scrutiny and potentially punishment from the estate.[146]The diligence this task required was therefore immense as women had to pair their physical exertion with a mental concentration as they completed their work.

Cutting and Reaping

Despite the immense amount of work brought by the crop season, laborers may have looked forward to this time because of the extra opportunities it awarded. Once the cane crop reached maturity, the frenzy of the cropping season commenced. There were more employment opportunities during this season than any other time of year on the island, and laborers could receive increased wages for their labor.[147] Cane cutting was performed with bill-hooks which laborers would use to both strike the cane down and then trim its leaves before tying bunches together. Women carried bunches of canes weighing dozens of pounds balanced atop their heads as they transported the harvest to the mills for processing.

[145] Barbados, Apr 1839- Mar 1840, Despatches: Apprentices, CO28/131, 205.

[146] Barbados, Jan-Aug 1839, Despatches: Apprentices Part I, Governor Sir C. T. M. Macgregor, 2 November, 1838-25 November, 1839, CO28/130, The National Archives, London, England. 310; Barbados, Apr 1839- Mar 1840, Despatches: Apprentices, CO28/130, 196.

[147] Barbados, Apr 1839- Mar 1840, Despatches: Apprentices, CO28/131.



Fig 5. "Sugar-Culture- Barbados." Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, Jean Blackwell Hutson Research and Reference Division, The New York Public Library. New York Public Library Digital Collections. https://digitalcollections.nypl.org/items/71c9d160-c624-012f-09e6-58d385a7bc34

Field Working Mothers

Women performed this labor while menstruating, pregnant, and breastfeeding. Pregnancy requires an incredible amount of energy, nutrients, and emotional labor. Women were expected to perform their usual field work tasks, sometimes until the very moment they gave birth. The removal of breaks for mothers to breastfeed and care for their children in emancipation left many women in their nine-hour field shifts with no relief. The reproductive demand placed on women's bodies compounded the difficulty of sugar cane cultivation, and women struggled to meet the physical demands of both childrearing and hard labor in the tropical climate. The role of mothering in emancipation era is the subject of chapter five.

The Foundation of the Sugar Empire

The intensive cultivation of sugar cane was neither intuitive nor unskilled, and the women who completed this work were therefore advanced in their knowledge of this process. It was one thing to understand the process of growing sugar cane, but to complete the labor it takes to grow it is a different story. Those with the power on the estate, possessed the least amount of functional knowledge about how to actually perform its creation. Each step of sugar cultivation and processing was central to the success of the planters' sugar empire. But this wealth began in the grassy field and would be impossible were it not for the skilled labor of praedial workers whose physical and mental labor created the commodity planters would then profit from.

Therefore, despite the plantocracy's attempts to belittle and devalue the Afro-Barbadian laborers, it was this very population who had the embodied knowledge to create such profits. Without the skilled expertise of praedial laborers whose bodies formed the foundation of the sugar empire, planters would be nothing but landowners. It may seem obvious that the labor of these workers fueled the sugar economy, but it is often overlooked the actual physical and mental

knowledge that was required of women to perform these activities. In acknowledging this labor and expertise behind it, women move from 'unskilled' fieldworkers to producers of one of the most valuable commodities of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

The embodied expertise women gained from working in field gangs must be taken beyond the plantation field to contemplate how this knowledge was utilized for women's own purposes, rather than those of the estate. In comparing the techniques and choices women made about their own plots with that of the work they completed for the estate, it is clear that their agricultural knowledge exceeded plantation cultivation.

The Plot

Laborer's cultivation of their rented plots was testament to the agricultural knowledge these communities possessed beyond the labor they performed for the estate. Their continuous cultivation of a large variety of crops from plots as small as a quarter of an acre was not directly transferable from the agriculture they did in the plantation monocultures. Through dissecting the crops known to be growing on these types of plots, women's labor and relationship to agriculture and land is broadened from the narrow scope of cane field labor they were associated with. From this exploration, it is not just their knowledge that is extraordinarily robust, but their application of that knowledge as well, which reveals the values held by formerly enslaved women and their communities.

West Africa in Barbados

Women retained practices and techniques of cultivation and processing of foodstuffs that their ancestors brought with them from their homes in West Africa. But expression of culture was not solely tied to traditions born across the Atlantic, as Afro-Barbadians developed new cultural practices amongst themselves on the island. The creation of a creole culture in Barbados,

although perhaps less 'African' than the creolization of other islands, illustrates the integration of colonial English society and African tradition in forming an Afro-Barbadian culture. By 1817 only 7% of the enslaved population of Barbados were African-born, and by full emancipation the island had the highest creole-born population in the British West Indies.[148]

This high creole population relative to the region is one of the reasons historians have used to explain the lack of Africanisms visible in Barbadian culture comparative to other Anglophone Caribbean island nations such as Jamaica and Trinidad. Some have gone as far as to suggest that Barbados is one of the least 'African' of the Caribbean islands. This assertion is true in many ways, mostly due the early creolization of the enslaved population and the comparatively limited possibilities for maronnage on the island.[149] However, to say that African culture was completely erased in the construction of a Barbadian culture is to grossly underestimate the continuities that did in fact, and still to this day, exist on the island. These traces of cultural traditions that survived both the Atlantic voyage and colonial plantation society, are visible in the cultivation, processing, and vending of foods from Afro-Barbadian plots.

Many aspects of Barbadian culture can be understood as a creole conglomerate of different influences from Indigenous Americans, British and other Europeans, and West Africans. The degree to which the institution of slavery, colonialism, and British power shaped Afro-Barbadian culture in comparison to retained traditions from Africa and learned knowledge from the tangential enslavement of Indigenous peoples in Barbados makes the landscape of

[148] B.W. Higman, "The Slave Family and Household in the British West Indies, 1800-1834," *Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 6, no. 2(1975), 265.

[149] Edwina Ashie-Nikoi, "Cohobbloplot: Africanisms in Barbadian Culture through the Lens of Crop-Over," *The Journal of Caribbean History* 32, no.1(1998): 82-120.

Barbadian culture difficult to untangle. Slavery seeped into nearly every element of life for the enslaved, rendering an evaluation of Afro-Barbadian nineteenth-century culture as inseparable from this institution. Additionally, enslaved Africans were not a monolith and came from culturally diverse and distinct communities from across West Africa, with the best estimates inferring that the majority of those arriving in Barbados came from what is today, Ghana, Togo, Benin, and Angola.[150]

Garden spaces were one of the few sites of laborer's lives where culture and knowledge sourced from Africa was able to prosper in face of the power structures imposed by colonialism and chattel slavery. Undoubtedly, these spaces were not simply reflections of African continuity given that both plants and cultural influences from Europe and the New World alike shaped the landscape of provision plots. However, because planters expressed little interested in these sites, Afro-Barbadians' cultivation ensured foods and plants of African and AmerIndian importance would survive as culturally relevant.

Decades after the closing of the slave trade, plants of African origin were keeping Afro-Barbadian communities alive in the context of emancipation. The origin of these plants is solidified by the names given to them by Europeans, who used geographical references to mark the origin and discovery of such plants.[151] The English frequently marked plants as African by adding the name "Guinea," a common synonym to Africa used by slave traders. Important examples in the Barbadian context include guinea corn (sorghum), guinea fowl, and guinea grass. Other plants, such as the African pigeon pea, retained more specific African geographical

[150] Ashie-Nikoi, 92.

[151] Judith Carney, "The Origins of African Foodways in the Americas," in *General History of Africa X: Africa and its Diasporas,* ed by Vanicléia Silva Santos, (Paris: UNESCO, 2025): 708.

names, in this case as the Congo pea or Angola pea. Finally, some plants avoided this European rebranding and retained names that are rooted in African languages: banana, yams, okra, and eddoes are prominent examples seen in Barbados. These plants can be seen in the plots of Cudjoe and John Williams. The origin of these plants from Africa is significant because it demonstrates the continuation of agricultural tradition across the Atlantic and marks the plots of Afro-Caribbean laborers as connected to their West African origins. Furthermore, the naming of these plants as distinctly African paired with the relative lack of consumption of many of these plants by colonial Europeans reinforces the ways in which food was racialized and tied to identity and power in Barbados.[152]

Tropical Agriculture

It was not just the crops themselves that differed from those valued by the planter class, but the cultivation methods and planting techniques as well. As mentioned, the diversity of laborers' plots exceeded the monotony of the plantation. This is illustrated in the appraisals of John Williams and Crudjoe's plots, reflected in the immense diversity produced from a small land area. This technique, called multicropping, allowed for a variety of plants to be grown in the same space; from root crops, to cover crops and legumes, and fruit trees. Unlike the planting of sugarcane, laboring classes did not learn this strategy from their positions as agricultural labors on the estate, but from a cultural tradition of agriculture carried across the Atlantic and creolized with Indigenous knowledge and the incorporation of new food crops in the Americas.

Unlike British colonials, whose agricultural background rested in the temperate climate of the U.K., the tropical climatic conditions of parts of West Africa provided an agricultural

[152]Judith Carney, "Seeds of Memory: Botanical Legacies of the African Diaspora." in *African Ethnobotany in the Americas,* edited by Robert Voeks & John Rashford, (New York: Springer, 2013).

background for some enslaved laborers arriving in the New World. In fact, many of the crops brought from Africa to the Caribbean were initially taken as provisions for Africans on the voyage across the Atlantic. Plantains, yams, and sorghum are all examples of foods that were rationed on slave ships, in part because of their availability on the West African coast, and also due to a common slave ship captain belief that enslaved Africans would have a higher chance of survival on the voyage if fed familiar foods.[153] This meant that when Africans arrived in the Caribbean for the first time, they were accompanied by foods and a climate that may have been familiar to them. Enslaved communities could then pull from their knowledge of agriculture in their homelands, to help them survive in the New World. The early contact between enslaved AmerIndians and Africans added knowledge about local plants and climate to the agricultural practices of enslaved communities, creating a creolization of planting techniques and crops of various origins into one space of subsistence survival. Multicropping can therefore be understood as a continuation of the tropical agriculture practiced in West Africa, with the added knowledge of New World plants and climatic conditions.

Some of the challenges of cultivation in tropical climates are mitigated by the multicropping technique. For example, despite the lush appearance of tropical areas, soils in these climates typically lack fertility as nutrients are locked in the plant mantle, making soil fertility degradation an issue once land is cleared for agriculture. This is further compromised by heavy rainfall patterns which can erode away soil and with it, any nutrients contained in the top layers. The lack of seasons in the tropics enhances the negative impacts of insects on crops, since insect populations can remain high year-long. These challenges would have been new to

[153] Judith Carney, "African Plant and Animal Species in Eighteenth-Century Tropical America," in *Cultural Exchange and Consumption Patterns in the Age of Enlightenment Europe and the Atlantic World,* ed. By Veronika Hayden-Handscho et. Al, 97-115, (Bochum: Winkler Verlag, 2013), 97.

Europeans accustomed to temperate farming; but for West Africans arriving in the Caribbean, some would have already experienced these tropical challenges and carried knowledge of how to handle these threats.

Multicropping addresses these challenges in particular. By rarely leaving land cleared, through crop rotation, intercropped trees, and diverse plant populations, multicropped gardens were less susceptible to soil and nutrient erosion. When soil did become depleted, manure, secondary growth ash, and legumes were used to add nutrients back into the earth. The diversity of the plants in these systems also mitigates the threat of insect populations, by providing backup foods in the case that one crop is heavily targeted and destroyed.[154] This knowledge of tropical agriculture was certainly advantageous to Africans arriving in the New World in bondage, as their survival at times, rested on their ability to feed themselves from their allocated lands. Furthermore, familiarity with West African root crops like yam made for an easier adoption of AmerIndian root crops like cassava, which further combatted the added threat of hurricanes in the Caribbean, as their subterranean nature protected them when other vegetation was destroyed. Enslaved communities then could establish, adapt, and continue agricultural practices that kept them alive, passing these techniques and knowledge to the next generation.

Unearthing the Archival Plot

The limited interest of planters in these garden spaces rendered their visibility limited in the colonial archive. The 1840 creation of the Assistant Court of Appeal in Barbados gave laboring class Afro-Barbadians the power to appeal if they were unsatisfied with the outcome of

[154] Judith A. Carney & Richard Nicholas Rosomoff, *In the Shadow of Slavery: Africa's Botanical Legacy in the New World,* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2009), 25.

a magistrate's decision.[155] Several cases of laborer dissatisfaction with crop appraisals brought the contents of laborer's plots into the colonial archive. However, in all of these cases raised to the Court of Appeal, men were the appellants. This archival marginalization of women's rented plots demonstrates the gendered landscape of emancipation, as Afro-Barbadian men benefitted from the patriarchal norms of the British colony. While men and women in the laboring classes likely planted similar crops on their rented plots, gendered societal factors posit hesitation towards making this claim. Women's dominant role in fieldwork and men's in animal husbandry for example, could have influenced the approach these two groups carried with them to their plots. Furthermore, women's legal responsibility for their children, their relative lack of other job opportunities, and their lower wage rate could move them to grow different types or amounts of crops than their male counterparts. Despite these potential gendered approaches to the cultivation of their plots, the appraisals of men's plots in the Court of Appeal are valuable documents to uncovering the plot.

John Lue was a located laborer on the Kendall Estate in 1840, where he was evicted from his rented plot and cottage for "misbehavior."[156] In accordance with the Contract Law's procedures for planter eviction, the crops on John's land were to be appraised and he was to be compensated for their value. But when only one manager was present for the appraisal instead of the legal requirement of three, John's case was brought to the Court of Appeal as complaint of an unfair appraisal. The inclusion of the final renewed appraisal, as seen in figure 6, the court documents provide a snapshot of the contents of located laborers' rented plots.

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[155] M. Layrle, "Report made to the Rear Admiral commanding the French Naval Station of the Antilles", June 1, 1841. Report translated and edited by David Gobert and Jerome Handler, "Barbados in the Post-Apprenticeship Period the Observations of a French Naval Officer- 1," *The Journal of the Barbados Museum and Historical Society* 35, no. 4(1978): 253-254.

[156] Barbados, 1840, Despatches: Proceedings before the Court of Appeal, CO28/136, The National Archives, London, England, 181-184.

1600 lbs Sugar @ $7 ……..	$112.00
48 Gallons of molasses @ 40 Cents ……	$ 19.20
12 Loads Cane Tops @ 50 Cents……	$ 6.00
½ an Acre of Trash……..……..……..…..…	$ 6.00
2100 lbs of Ginger @ 80 Cents ……..…….……	$ 16.80
½ an Acre Guinea Corn 10 Bushels @ 1.50cents …..$	15.00
A piece of Arrowroot ……..…….	$ 0.50
A Patch of Potatoes…….……	$ 2.50
812 Holes of Pea Trees……	$ 3.00
10 Plantain Trees Trees [sic] @ 1/8 Dollar each…….$	1.25
A heap of Manure 1$…….…..……$	1.00
	$183.35

Figure 6 Plot appraisal for located laborer John Lue. Barbados, 1840, Despatches: Proceedings before the Court of Appeal, CO28/136, The National Archives, London, England, 183.

Cane from the Plot

The purpose of laborer's rented plots rested on a different set of goals than those of planters and the estate fields. Planters used their lands to cater to the sugar market whose profitability originated in consumer tastes overseas. As such, diversification of the agricultural sector would direct land and resources towards crops that held a lesser value on the international market. Furthermore, plantations, especially the larger ones, often possessed a vertical integration over sugar manufacturing as they owned and employed labor in boiling and curing houses to process the raw cane into exportable commodities such as rum, molasses, and granulated sugar. The investment in infrastructure for sugar production further incentivized planters to focus their resources on this singular commodity.

Laboring populations had different incentives for their land use. While sugarcane was an available option for laborers to gain money, this class did not own any means to process or refine their canes. Options for selling this product were therefore limited to buyers who could process the cane into a product for export. Therefore, laborers could not sell sugar on the international market but instead had to sell their canes to plantations for refinement, limiting their scope of

buyers to the regional sugar industry. Despite not having access to the international market, the value of cane as the basis for the top export commodities made it valuable to planters who frequently purchased the cane of located laborers. Cane cultivation on located laborer's plots could therefore be understood as an extension of plantation labor, with the difference being that the laborer could directly profit from their cultivation. Because laborers benefitted from maximizing their cane crop on their plots, they had more incentive to use their agricultural expertise towards this cultivation than they did when working on the estate. For this reason, women's true knowledge of cane cultivation was exerted towards their own crops.

Located laborers used similar techniques to those they acquired while working in the field gangs to maximize cane production on their own plots. Because women made up the majority of fieldworkers, they may have had a gendered advantage over men in growing sugarcane. More time and experience working in planation sugar fields familiarized women with the growing process compared to their male counterparts who spent more time employed in the curing and boiling houses, or in animal husbandry. When it came to their own rented plots then, women already understood the basics of field preparation, planting, fertilization, and crop rotation. Rented plots, typically ranging from ¼ to 1 acre in size, reproduced the system of cultivation used on the estate on a smaller scale.

John's plot for example, contained ½ acre of cane trash, a heap of manure, and two patches of canes in different phases of the growing cycle. The extensive area of cane trash, and the one acre in first crop and ½ acre in second crop canes, reveals a staggering of cane planting. Rather than planting his entire cane harvest at once, John staggered planting canes by weeks or months apart. This temporal separation in his cane patches suggests that rather than using his plot to produce one singular monotonous crop, John had divided this small piece of land into smaller

plots that could then rotate in their purpose. It is likely that John would have been waiting for another crop, perhaps one of yams, nuts, or potatoes to come to harvest before he could plant the second crop of canes. Keeping his canes in different cycles also provided security for the future market. The price he could receive for selling his cane would be dependent on the supply of canes on the respective estate of his sale. Harvesting and selling canes prior to an estate's own harvest season, could award John more than if he were to try and sell when the estate already had ample cane to process.[157] Having multiple cane patches also functioned as a security measure for a backup crop in the case that one was met with a problem such as an issue with weather, insects, or disease. There was a chance that the other may avoid the problem due to the difference in the phase of growth. John's plot reflects how laborers could increase financial security through diversification, even through the same type of crop.

Diversity, Compatibility, and Export

But rented plots were seldom planted completely in canes. Just as planting multiple cane cycles helped avoid a total loss in case of problems, laborers typically planted different types of crops on their plots in order to diversify their options. Even where cane was planted, laborers used the same intercroppping techniques they fulfilled in their fieldwork positions to reap both food and canes from the same soil. On plantations, sweet potatoes were one of the only plants intercropped with cane, as this rotation was complementary to the growing seasons and cycles planters desired in terms of producing both provisions and sugar. But laborers went beyond this technique to grow different complementary crops together.

[157] Hilary Beckles, *Great House Rules: Landless Emancipation and Workers' Protest in Barbados 1838-1938,* (Kingston, Ian Randle Publishers, 2004), 88.

On John's plot, his second crop of canes was intercropped with pigeon peas, which the appraisal totaled to 812 holes of trees from this ½ acre in canes. Unlike sweet potatoes, pigeon peas are legumes that perform nitrogen fixation which deeply enriches soil fertility, capable of adding over 200 lbs of nitrogen per acre.[158]While the sheer scale of plantation agriculture permitted entire fields to be rotated and fallowed upon soil fertility decline, laborers had very limited space to plant in the first place and could not afford to fallow land in face of hunger and poverty. This meant that located laborers had to creatively find ways to add nutrients back into the soil, without sacrificing potential food or income. By intercropping pigeon peas with cane, John was preparing the soil for its next undertaking following the cane, by restoring the nitrogen that the cane was using to grow. While nitrogen fixing plants are not always edible, the pigeon pea is an edible and nutritious legume that was regularly consumed by laboring populations. This extended the purpose of these trees as nutritional for the soil and humans alike. This technique illustrates the creativity and knowledge of laboring communities in finding more efficient and productive ways to maximize the production of their plots, while retaining this knowledge for their own personal and communal use.

Laborers multicropped their plots outside of their cane production as well. On ¼ acre of John's plot, he multicropped ginger, yams, nuts, and potatoes in the same limited space. While the account does not specify the type of nut, it can be assumed that this was the groundnut (peanut), since this food was brought to English plantation colonies as a leftover provision from slave ships.[159]The "nut" which is actually a legume, had been cultivated in West Africa since the

[158] C.S. Nautiyal et al, "Nodulation, Nitrogen Fixation, and Hydrogen Oxidation by Pigeon Pea *Bradyrhizobium* spp. In Symbiotic Association with Pigeon Pea, Cowpea, and Soybean," *Appleseed and Environmental Microbiology* 51, no. 1(1988): 94-97. doi: 10.1128/aem.54.1.94-97.1988

[159] Carney, "Seeds of Memory," 28.

16th century and became a staple crop in the 'Negro gardens' in Barbados. Similarly to the intercropping of cane and pigeon pea, the nuts were likely grown on this plot to add nitrogen back into the soil while also serving as a food source. John grew these nuts alongside the ground provisions, and despite the seemingly competitive nature of four crops in one quarter acre, the harvest was substantial. In the nineteenth century, Indian cultivation of ginger was averaging 2500 lbs/acre.[160] John's final appraisal compensated him for 2,100lbs of ginger from his multicropped ¼ acre. This places John's production at nearly four times that of ginger cultivation in Indian orchards during the same time period. It is likely that John's plot may have been even more productive than this number suggests, since ginger grows significantly as it matures and younger ginger yields a much lower weight. Because John was evicted, it may have been that his ginger had not yet fully matured upon appraisal and the patch could have produced significantly more weight if allowed to come to maturity. Moreover, the ginger grew alongside potatoes, yams, and peanuts which added to the productivity and yield that was achieved on a mere ¼ acre. John's plot therefore stands to illustrate the density in which food was grown on these small, rented pieces of land. The labor and knowledge behind such a fruitful operation must not be overlooked here.

Ginger was valuable as an export crop secondary to sugar. Because sugar was the primary commodity, laborers were in competition with the plantation's exportation of sugar cane and faced more regulation and resistance from planters when planting land in canes. For this reason, many laborers turned to secondary export crops whose value on the international market could help turn a profit. While ginger and other secondary exports made up a much smaller

[160] Kodoth Prabhakaran Nair, "The Agronomy and Economy of Ginger," in *Turmeric (Curcuma longa L.) and Ginger (Zingiber officinale Rosc.)- World's Invaluable Medicinal Spices: The Agronomy and Economy of Turmeric and Ginger,* 245-316, *(*Cham, Switzerland: Springer Nature Switzerland, 2019), 251.

percentage of total exports when compared to sugar, the return for these crops could be significant for laborers selling them with little to no competition with plantations.[161] From the medieval ages to the end of the nineteenth century, the British created a demand for ginger via its use in English taverns as a ground spice for sprinkling and stirring into beer and ales. The root was also recognized for its medicinal properties in Europe with writers as early as the sixteenth century referring to the root as "of an eating and digesting quality, and profitable for the stomach."[162]Located laborers could therefore appeal to this demand in the international market by growing the root in their gardens. The success of ginger production in John's appraisal helps trace the significant exportation of the crop from Barbados in the mid-nineteenth century despite the lack of evidence that ginger was being grown on plantations. The sheer quantity of ginger cultivated in ¼ acre explains that laborers themselves were primarily responsible for the output of ginger in this time period.

Other appraisals in the Court of Appeal reveal a number of other plants grown on rented plots including cassava, plantain, arrowroot, guinea corn, eddoes and papaya.[163] Of these plants, arrowroot, cassava and papaya are indigenous to the Americas.[164] Their cultivation in laborers' gardens is a reflection of the early interaction between enslaved Indigenous Americans and Africans. Cassava is significant because of its similarity to the cultivation of African root

[161] Jerome Handler, "The History of Arrowroot and the Origin of Peasantries in the British West Indies," *Journal of Caribbean History* 2, (May 1971): 80.

[162]Nair, "Agronomy and Economy of Ginger," 249.

[163] Barbados, 1841, Despatches: Proceedings before the Court Appeal, July 1840 - December 1841, CO28/141, The National Archives, London, England, 414; Barbados, Jan-Aug 1839, Despatches: Apprentices Part I, Governor Sir C. T. M. Macgregor, 2 November, 1838-25 November, 1839, CO28/130, The National Archives, London, England.

[164] Lee Johnson, Mixing Memory and Desire: How History Shaped the Foods of the Caribbean, (Kingston: Ian Randle Publishers, 2025), 8.

provisions, but also for the specificity required in its processing to make it edible for human consumption. Cassava root contains natural cyanogenic compounds which are toxic to humans if consumed, as they cause cyanide poisoning.[165] To make the starch edible, it must undergo an extensive processing method, typically involving grating, pressing, and drying the root to remove the toxins.[166] The complicated and important process is further evidence to African and Indigenous contact in Barbados as Afro-Barbadians were able to adopt the processing methods to add this root to their own diets.[167] Gender was central to the history of processing the plant, with women typically being the ones responsible for this detoxifying process.[168] The root was also used by enslaved women working as cooks or domestics in attempts to poison their enslavers.[169] This weaponization of cassava as a food of resistance, gave it a suspicious status in the eyes of the planter classes, leaving the market for cassava to rest primarily among Afro-Caribbean populations themselves.[170]The root therefore represents a tradition of Indigenous knowledge and enslaved resistance as a complicated food source that was inaccessible to British colonials in the Caribbean. The capacity for laboring populations to grow and consume this plant is testament to the knowledge they possessed around successful subsistence in the Americas. Furthermore, the

[165] Ruth Joy Moses et al, "Cassava Consumption and the Risk from Cyanide Poisoning," *Vegetos* 38, (2025): 1717-1724, https://doi.org/10.1007/s42535-024-01121-w

[166]Janet Momsen, "Gender and the Food History of the Caribbean: The Case of Cassava in Barbados," in *Bridging Worlds- building feminist geographies: essays in honour of Janice Monk,* ed. by Anindita Datta, (London: Routledge, 2023), [272-282], p. 275.

[167] Rudy Chaulet, "Cassava: A Major Staple in Pre- and Post-Conquest America," in *Food, Feasting and Table Manners in the Early Renaissance Volume II,* 242-262 *(*London: Routledge, 2025), 253.

[168] Momsen, "Cassava in Barbados," 275.

[169] Candice, Lee Goucher. *Congotay! Congotay: a global history of Caribbean food,* (London: Routledge, 2015), 128.

[170] Sarah Lawson Welsh, *Food, Text, and Culture in the Anglophone Caribbean,* (London: Rowman & Littlefield, 2019).

non-African origin of cassava underscores the adaptability of Afro-Caribbean communities to integrate food sources that were not familiar to them into their diets.

Competition and Flexibility

The diversity of the rented plot therefore illustrates the tendency for laborers to anticipate a wide variety of future outcomes, and to prepare for this uncertainty with an array of options. Allocating too much time, land, energy, and resources to any one given crop or strategy could result in a total loss. By preparing for a variety of outcomes, laborers maximized the flexibility of the mobilization of their plots. While it could be imagined that laborers would attempt to maximize cane cultivation in emancipation given its monetary value, the fact that this commodity was the business of the plantocracy made it a risky endeavor.

The profitably of sugarcane and the laboring classes' immense knowledge of its cultivation posed a visible threat to planters who were aiming to keep laborers dependent on them. Knowing the potential economic freedom a strong cane crop could produce, planters tended to dissuade their tenants from the growing of the crop or manipulate their export of it. The case of Betsy Cleaver, as relayed by historian Hilary Beckles in *Great House Rules* illustrates this tendency, as the planter for whom she worked for, used his power of ejectment to dictate Betsy's use of her crop.[171] Betsy used her knowledge of both cane cultivation and the cane market to bring her crop to fruition ahead of that of the estate on which she lived. The planter however, demanded that she wait to harvest until the estate had completed its harvest and export of the season's crop. Doing so, would decrease the value of her cane in the midst of the large estate harvest. Betsy refused the planters objection and sold her harvest to her husband's estate. The planter consequently ejected Betsy and her infirm uncle from her plot and cottage under the located

[171] Hilary Beckles, *Great House Rules: Landless Emancipation and Workers Protest in Barbados 1838-1938,* (Kingston: Ian Randle Publishers: 2004), 88-89.

labor system. Such ejectment was not uncommon for simple offenses as Betsy's, and the particular case of competition with the estate in harvesting sugar cane underscores the unique attention planters gave to this crop.

This continued power held by planters over laborer's rented plots underscores the difference between landownership and the rented access under Contract Law. These women were not truly free to plant whatever they wanted, and they had to keep the success of their cultivation relatively hidden in order to not pose too strong of a threat to the planter class. By planting crops that were either unknown or unvalued by the plantocracy, they could continue to grow food and generate income without raising the suspicion of their estate.

Therefore, located laborers planned their cultivation in accordance with their knowledge of plantation society, particularly the power dynamics that so often dictated their realities. By planting crops with multiple uses, especially ones that could be either consumed or sold, women avoided the total loss of their investment of time, energy, and resources. As seen in Betsy Cleaver's case, their awareness of fluctuations in market prices allowed women to make informed decisions about the best moments to harvest their crops. These skills add to the agricultural knowledge discussed in this chapter, illustrating women's understanding of the social and economic systems they lived in. The rented plot was therefore not just a reflection of tropical agriculture, but one that was highly specific to the circumstances of post-emancipation Barbados. The women cultivating these spaces combined agricultural knowledge with socio-economic literacy and an awareness of island and global food systems to maximize the limited opportunity this access to land provided. This knowledge expanded beyond the cultivation of the plot, to the mobilization of the food grown from it, as discussed in the next chapter.

IV. Plantation Peripheries and Rented Plots: Food Mobilization

In June of 1839, a case was brought to the Court of Appeal by Mary Bassett, a located laborer who had been accused of stealing corn stalks from the plantation grounds. Mary had been sentenced to five days in prison and was required to pay a fine according to the original decision of magistrates. In the testimony of plantation superintendent, John Williams, he claimed that the corn stalk harvest of the plantation was missing a heap two mornings in a row. To search for the missing corn, Williams sent a watchman named Cuffy to search the negro yard. In Mary's house, Cuffy found "as many [stalks] packed against the upper part of the house as would have filled a cart body,"[172] and so Mary was accused of stealing these stalks from the estate. But in her testimony, Mary swore that both her and her husband's ¼ acre plots they rented from estate had been planted in corn and that the stalks found in her house came from their plots, not the estate grounds. But this argument did not hold up in court, and Mary was forced to pay for the offense both financially and with jail time.[173]

Whether or not Mary took the stalks from the estate grounds, accusations against laborers for stealing food were commonplace in emancipation Barbados. She was ultimately found guilty due to Cuffy's testimony that he found both her own stalks and that of the estate in her house and that they could be differentiated from one another. The stalks belonging to Mary were drier and tied with three bands while those of the estate, Cuffy testified, were fresher and bound by only one band. John Williams shared in his own testimony that the missing stalks had likely fallen out of the cart while he was transporting the harvest. If the testimonies of Cuffy and Williams were true, Mary had likely seen the stalks fall from the cart and taken the opportunity to increase her

[172] Barbados, Jan-Aug 1839, Despatches: Apprentices Part I, Governor Sir C. T. M. Macgregor, 2 November, 1838-25 November, 1839, CO28/130, The National Archives, London, England, 434.

[173] Barbados, Jan-Aug 1839, CO28/130, 431- 435.

food supply. The case illustrates an example of the creative avenues to survival taken by agricultural laboring women in the context of an expensive and scarce food landscape. Although Mary was ultimately found guilty, her case is representative of laborers' continuous search to expand their access to food and wages while simultaneously navigating the plantocracy's surveillance and control over the avenues to this access. Laboring women therefore adopted strategies of survival and access that were grounded in their knowledge of plantation systems of control and then mobilized this food to best advance their own visions of emancipation.

Survival and Progress

Women's creative and intentional use of their rented plots was often directly linked to their survival in emancipation society. Because planters weaponized food as a tool of control, women often struggled to feed themselves and their families. These women's options for provisioning were highly dictated by the plantation economy. In order to grow crops, they needed access to land which had been tied to plantation labor under the tenantry system. While they could also purchase their provisions in the markets, this required wages which were likewise only accessible through performing labor or selling foodstuffs. Without employment and corresponding land and/or wages, laboring women had few resources to keep themselves fed. This system coupled with the planters' intentional destruction of island provisions left a large population of formerly enslaved laborers with no means of feeding themselves upon emancipation. Survival at times therefore depended on the creativity and resistance that would permit laborers and their families to eat in times of scarcity.

Theft and 'Picking'

One of the fundamental contradictions of the plantation landscape was the monotonous and total island cultivation of caloric foodstuffs, alongside a growing population of hungry and

starving people. As food was weaponized as a tool of planter control, this cruel irony became more evident, as starvation increased on an island producing an immense amounts of calories. Yet, this landscape of dispossession was not impenetrable, and some Afro-Barbadians made claim to the policed abundance.

The 'theft' of foodstuffs by laborers was a frequent accusation that entailed punishment, furthering the planter's agenda of using food as a tool of control. Throughout the course of slavery, physical punishments against the enslaved were both legal and common on estates, as planters used fear and violence to maintain control over enslaved laborers. Flogging/whipping remained a viable punishment following abolition, although it was banned against women in 1826.[174] With emancipation moving disciplinary power out of planters' hands and into a matter of the state, the Barbados legislature cracked down on theft at the start of Apprenticeship in 1834 by removing distinctions between 'petty' larceny and 'grand' larceny.[175] The primary punishment as outlined by the 1834 law could range from a maximum of seven years expulsion overseas, or up to two years in a workhouse or imprisoned with hard labor, with men subject to additional private or public whippings.[176] Laborers accused of taking food to which the planter, magistrate, or other witness believed they were not entitled, were punished for larceny. Other

[174] A Supplemental Act to an Act entitled "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, and for the better Order and Government of Slaves, and for giving them further Protection and Security, for altering the mode of Trial of those charged with capital and other Offences and for other Purposes," 17 October, 1826, Papers in Explanation of Measures for Melioration of Condition of Slave Population in W. Indies and S. America, Part 1., 1827 House of Commons, HC oo6, 1826-27, Laws of Enslavement and Freedom in the Anglo-Atlantic World, University of New Brunswick Libraries, Canada, https://slaveryandfreedomlaws.lib.unb.ca/laws/barbados-1826-2 (hereafter cited as 'Consolidated Slave Laws 1826")

[175] Barbados. "Laws of Barbados: [1648-1874]" 1875. William Clowes and Sons, London. Harvard University. 24019077. https://catalog.hathitrust.org/Record/100187083/Cite. 131.

[176] Barbados, "Laws of Barbados," 131.

punishments for thefts included the treadmill,[177] fines, or degrading punishments such as hair shaving.[178] Enslaved and apprenticed laborers were allowed only those provisions the planter decided to allocate, and they did not own the right to the crops they produced through their labor on the plantation (aside from what was grown on land they rented). This did not change upon emancipation, and laborers remained dispossessed from the rights to the plantation products, in the eyes of British colonial law. As Mary's case demonstrated, legally, to take from a field that was not rented to her, was considered stealing. These harsh punishments were designed to keep access to food under planter control, especially in an agricultural society in which food could be found on nearly every corner of the plantation.

Although criminalized and severely punished, laborers used the abundance of the plantation landscape to navigate the manufactured scarcity that characterized their lives in emancipation. Laboring populations made a distinction between 'picking' and 'stealing,' the former referring to the taking of foodstuffs to feed themselves and their families. This distinction was rooted in laborers' awareness of the ways in which the system dispossessed them from the fruits of their labor. "Strange to say, they are not willing to purchase [food] from the Estates on which they are domiciled, under the impression that as they planted it, they ought to receive it gratuitously," reported magistrate Carew in 1839 in response to concerns of food shortages for

[177] Barbados Museum & Historical Society, "Treadmill in Barbados," Facebook, January, 5, 2019, https://www.facebook.com/photo/?fbid=10156916400888383&set=a.471301835008750; The treadmill was used as a method of punishment throughout the 1820s-40s in the British West Indies but was used in Barbados specifically from 1830-37. The treadmill was a manually operated sugar refiner, similar to the ones operated by windmill on the island. However, this treadmill was powered by a row of humans, strapped by their wrists overhead, forced to walk up an endless row of moving steps while an overseer stood by to whip any worker who fell behind. Women were forced to "dance the mill" just as men were, even elderly and pregnant women. This punishment was cruel and relentless, and resulted in injuries and exhaustion.

[178] Matilde Cazzola. "'There Is in the Great Big Law Too Much Bad Little Law': The Slavery Abolition Act and Labour Laws in the Post-Emancipation British West Indies." *Journal of the Max Planck Institute for Legal History and Legal Theory* 32, (2024): 65. Http://dx.doi.org/10.12946/rg32/058-079

laboring populations. The outright rejection of laborers to purchase the food they grew from the estate highlights their determination to reclaim their labor as their own. Women took this ideological resistance to their exploitation to the next level when they sidestepped planter control over their cultivation by making claim to the crops produced by their own labor. Mary could have very well believed that her role in growing the corn as an employed fieldworker gave her the moral right to the crop. Many Afro-Barbadians participated in 'picking,' as one visitor to the island in the late 1840s remarked, even those children "whose parents have not a single inch of cane in cultivation, come to school day after day with a big cane for their midday lunch."[179]In 'picking' canes from plantation monocultures, women reclaimed the right to their own production.

This distinction between 'picking' and 'stealing' was not reflected in Barbadian legislation, and colonial officials consider the self-acquisition of food crops from land of which one is not the owner as a legal offense. 'Petty thefts,' as they were recorded in magistrate reports, were the most common offense in the initial decades of emancipation. Hundreds of these "crimes" were reported from each magistrates' respective parishes every few months, not to mention that these were only for the cases in which laborers had been caught.[180]The large number of cases of theft indicate that laborers frequently reached beyond their own rented plots to provision themselves and their families, and this foraging seldom skipped over the vast cane fields, ripe with an excess amount of canes in the crop season.

Because it was a punishable offense, laboring populations were likely strategic in their acquisition of crops from plantation fields. Cane was an ideal crop for 'picking' for several

[179] Chester, *Transatlantic Sketches West Indies,* 69.

[180] Barbados, Apr 1839- Mar 1840, Despatches: Apprentices, CO28/131.

reasons. Firstly, the abundance of the plant made tracking its origin difficult. Especially in the first years of emancipation, when both planters and laborers were planting the majority of their land in sugarcane, it was difficult for an estate manager to determine if laborers were seen eating a cane from the plantation or from one of their own plots. Additionally, during harvest, canes were widespread across the island making it nearly impossible to prove if any given cane was purchased or 'picked' without a witness to the act. Many agricultural laborers also had easy access to sugarcane. Whether working in the field or elsewhere on the plantation, the seemingly endless monocrop of the plant provided ample opportunity to sneak a stalk into one's dress. Particularly during harvest, when it would not be suspicious to find a laborer cutting down cane, cane cutters might have found ways to sneak a portion of the crop for themselves or their family. Cane cutting was a job in high demand during the period of harvest, and even laborers who often struggled to find work could easily land a cutting job during this time. This period was therefore even more important for such laborers as it awarded them opportunity to both obtain wages and calories. Evidence that enslaved laborers in the Carolinas tied their skirts when harvesting rice to sneakily capture a supply for themselves indicates that agricultural laborers devised clever tricks to gain access to the foods they were dispossessed of.[181] Mary may have only taken the corn bushels because the fact that her and her husband both grew corn on their plots gave her an alternative piece of evidence to claim if accused of theft. Although this excuse did not hold up in court, Mary may not have even tried to take the stalks in the first place had she not thought through an explanation to get her out of trouble. Awareness of planter surveillance was therefore crucial to finding successful survival strategies.

[181] Tiya Miles, *All That She Carried: The Journey of Ashley's Sack, A Black Family Keepsake* (Manhattan, Random House, 2021).

Picking from plantation grounds was a great strategy for laborers to receive extra calories, but it was not a sustainable endeavor. It was it risky to 'pick' given the legal prosecution of the act if caught. But it also wasn't a viable strategy year-long. The cane harvest was the most abundant time on the island and starvation during this period was seldom experienced given the various opportunities for both working and picking as well as the influx of food and money to the island. But beyond the crop period, 'picking' may have been a much more difficult and risky endeavor. Charges for petty thefts greatly decreased in the months preceding the harvest, likely due to the lack of crops ready to reap during certain periods.[182]Laboring populations were therefore subject to the cycles of crop rotation, both on their plots and those of the plantation.

Picking from the Periphery

Women used their knowledge about what plants and lands were valuable to the estate, to make calculated decisions regarding picking and foraging. Not all the opportunities for picking fell under the threat of punishment, given that limited scope of control on which planters focused. Planters punished 'picking' because it was understood by both the planters and British colonial law that crops grown on the plantation (apart from the 'Negro grounds') were the rightful property of the estate- not its laborers. But land that was not owned by an estate and estate land that was sitting idle were not of much importance to planters and were therefore more available to laborers as a site to 'pick.'

Foraging, while less fruitful in Barbados than in other islands with more natural landscape, was a strategic way for women to access valuable resources. Barbados is often contrasted to other island such as Jamaica, Haiti, and Aruba for its unique geographic and

[182] Barbados, 1836, Despatches, Offices and Individuals, CO28/118, The National Archives, London, England.

demographic features that prevented marronage and access to ownership of land for the formerly enslaved. The extensive and early deforestation of the island coupled with the fact that 100,000 of the 106,470 acres of the island were under some sort of cultivation by full emancipation in 1838,[183] have often been used as evidence for the lack of options for the enslaved and formerly enslaved to hide or subsist off of the plantation. However, this comparison has often led historians to understate the extent to which the enslaved and formerly enslaved in Barbados used the natural environment to their advantage. Although true that there remained virtually no naturally forested areas or extensive areas of natural and uncultivated terrain by the end of apprenticeship, this does not mean that there were no naturally grown plants available to agricultural laborers.

There were plants growing on the periphery of plantations, alongside roads and paths, on the edges of drinking water ponds, in between houses and fields, and anywhere else they could find room to peacefully grow. The landscape of these naturally occurring plants was as diverse as the human inhabitants of the island, with native and introduced varieties growing side-by-side in a creolization of the natural environment. It could be imagined that planters paid little attention to these peripheral species as many of the plants may have been unknown to this class and considered of little value or importance. Planters typically saw value in crops for their monetary worth, either for export sales or to decrease expenses on imported provisions. But the diversity of these roadside bushes, shrubs, grasses, and other plants could be incredibly valuable to laboring women who not only aimed to access to more resources but possessed knowledge about these plants that was unknown to the white elite.

[183] Davy, *The West Indies,* 108.

Foraging could reduce the need to plant particular crops in the rented plot. For example, women working on plantations would not dedicate the precious and limited land space of their rented plots to fodder for animals. While guinea corn and maize were grown in such plots and could have been fed to animals when needed, these crops were also fit for human consumption which added to their value as a crop to grow on the rented plot. But several fast-growing grasses on the island, including sour grass and guinea grass, grew quickly and abundantly as introduced species whose new home across the Atlantic granted perfect conditions with little competition or threats. As such, laboring classes utilized these grasses as fodder for their livestock, particularly for cattle, sheep, and goat.[184] While plantations sometimes dedicated land to the growing of fodder for livestock, laboring women aimed to be more resourceful by foraging rather than intentionally growing these grasses and grains.

Natural Remedies: foraging for medicinal plants

Foraging was also used to treat and cure maladies and injuries when they arose within the laboring communities. Medicinal traditions of 'bush baths' and 'cooling teas' were used to treat certain illnesses and infections among laborers, the plants for these remedies being found largely on the margins of the plantation. Both medicinal practices consisted of boiling a particular blend of plant material in water, the ratios of how many leaves, stems or flowers from each plant being carefully selected based on the issue at hand. Oral histories describe the seemingly regular practice of mothers leaving to collect the necessary ingredients to treat sickness or injury:

> Their mom would leave home at times and come back with a basket of plants and those plants would be used for them as tonics for them to sleep well at night, their colds and flu, their fevers, everything and she had a storehouse of knowledge. She knew what plants to use, how to use them, whether to use 3 leaves, 5 leaves.[185]

[184] Barbados, Jan-Aug 1839, CO28/130; Davy, *The West Indies,* 108.

[185] Julia S. Jordan-Zachery and Sonia Peter, *Healing roots, YouTube, 2020,* https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6q9UMudU8EQ

Medicinal knowledge used for these treatments was passed down through generations of Afro-Barbadians, as a creole medicine formed at the intersection of Indigenous, African, and even European medicinal practices. Bush baths were used for soaking and once completed- may have been dumped on the ground of the house and mopped into the floor.[186]

Medicinal knowledge was passed down generationally from older to younger generations, and different members of the community could posses more knowledge than others. Another oral history shares how medicinal knowledge was shared in communities:

> My mother always seemed to have a remedy. I believe that God directed her. She didn't really teach me per se; she did it, and I observed. When someone was ill, she would do so and so or use so and so, and many people sometimes came to her and ask her about what they could use, you know, for colds and so perhaps children had colds.[187]

Medicinal plant cures were not concrete recipes widespread across all laboring populations, but rather intuitive practices that passed through observational skills and practice. Oral histories suggest that these practices descended through family lines, a practitioner would not refer to a common recipe, but what she had learned from her "mother, father, auntie, […] all of those on whose shoulders she stood."[188] Not every woman would have had access to this knowledge, as it was primarily learned through lived experience alongside an elder. As such, some women in the community would be more familiar with herbal plant medicine than others, facilitating a communal practice of treatment. Laborers in the community may go to specific women whom they knew may have had a cure for a sickness or injury they were experiencing.

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[186] Jordan-Zachery and Peter, *Healing roots,* 7:20.

[187] Jordan-Zachery and Peter, *Healing Roots.*

[188] Jordan-Zachery and Peter, *Healing Roots.*

These women may or may not have connections to the more formally organized, "Obeah doctors" who could be found in each parish throughout the period of emancipation.[189] These doctors were Afro-Barbadians recognized among the community to have particularly advanced knowledge of traditional healing and spiritual practices, and most Afro-Barbadians turned to these doctors or other healers in the community instead of the white estate doctors. Not only were the estate doctors often inaccessible to laborers financially or socially, but laboring populations preferred traditional practitioners as they were more familiar with their treatments and perceived as more trustworthy. Obeah doctors and their methods were clearly foreign to white planters and visitors alike, who frequently accused these practitioners of using dark magic and spiritual and 'primitive' African practices. The practitioners undoubtedly turned to plant and herbal medicines, possibly even aiding in the dissemination of medicinal knowledge among laboring populations.[190]Agricultural laborers were therefore intertwined with the natural landscape in ways that other classes on the island were not. This relationship was even stronger for mothers who had the additional task of raising healthy children, which will be further explored in the following chapter.

Protection and Concealment of Valuables

Women secured more resources through picking or foraging, but also of importance was protecting their resources from the plantocracy. Formerly enslaved laborers continuously took measures to protect themselves from the exploitation of the planter class, casting doubt on the trustworthiness of colonial officials and managing their resources privately. Emancipation legislation prohibited planters and estate managers from physically punishing laborers as they

[189] Davy, *The West Indies, 82.*

[190] Jerome S. Handler, "Slave Medicine and Obeah in Barbados Circa 1650 to 1834," *New West Indian Guide* 74, no. 1/2(2000).

had once done under slavery, again turning this role over to the state. Planters, in wishing to retain their own power over laborers, turned to their power of ejectment along with the confiscation and destruction of property as means to punish and control laborers on their estates.

Upon total emancipation, most laborers employed strategies to protect what little resources or freedoms they could acquire. Rather than holding onto cash, laborers often kept their wealth in animal and material goods that they possibly perceived to be less threatened by planters. When asked whether savings banks should be available to laborers, most police magistrates reported that the laborers were quick to spend whatever wages they earned.[191] It is not surprising magistrates perceived laborers to hold little savings, as laborers themselves worked hard to keep any valuables hidden from planters and colonial officials, knowing that their wealth could be easily stripped from them if presented as a threat. Additionally, to planters, savings banks would decrease the dependency of the laborer on plantation labor because an accumulation of wealth could be used to subsist or to find work off of the plantation. And yet, there is likely some truth to the magistrates' claims of laborers spending their wages as soon as acquiring them, because of the looming threat of planter and colonial power of which laborers had continuously seen manipulated to their disadvantage.

Formerly enslaved communities kept their knowledge and their lives as shielded from the planter class as much as possible- a strategy that had been practiced under slavery. Afro-Barbadians strategically withheld information from their employers that could potentially be used against them. Of particular importance was the concealing of any items of value, as the formerly enslaved had experienced first-hand the tendency for planters to weaponize anything of value as a method of control. Planters had already done so with land and food, giving laborers a

[191] Barbados, Apr 1839- Mar 1840, Despatches: Apprentices, CO28/131, The National Archives, London, England.

sense of protection over other valuables such as their animals. Livestock was valuable to these communities both monetarily and for subsistence. Recognizing the value of this property, one magistrate described that for the laborers, "their savings banks is the rearing of pigs, sheep, and poultry."[192]And laborers indeed treated their animals as such. Agricultural laborers rejected sharing with police magistrates the number of animals they kept, "apprehending it as a measure preparatory to the imposition of a Tax on their Stock."[193] The immediate assumption that such a survey was being conducted to the ultimate disadvantage of the laboring population, is illustrative of the protectionist stance these communities had developed as a strategy of survival. Applying such protective measures to their animals and other valuables demonstrates the extent to which laboring populations understood the patterns of exploitation that planters had inflicted upon them. Laborers therefore used discretion and a refusal to cooperate as protective measures to mitigate threats to their property and valuables.

Survival for laboring populations can therefore be understood as a reaction and adaptation to the constraints and exploitation of the plantocracy as an institution. Access to food was intricately connected to planter power and Afro-Barbadian women consequently tailored their strategies to provisioning in tandem with the possibilities and challenges of emancipation society. Survival was not just dependent on the ability to grow food for oneself, but to recognize what the constraints and opportunities were made available within the located labor system, and to maximize production within this context. From taking crops 'belonging' to the estate, foraging for plants outside of planter supervision, and growing crops with multiple uses, laboring women navigated their lives through their knowledge of both agriculture and the plantocracy's power to

[192] Barbados, Apr 1839- Mar 1840, Despatches: Apprentices, CO28/131, 231.

[193] Barbados, Apr 1839- Mar 1840, Despatches: Apprentices, CO28/131.

survive. Nowhere was the mobilization of crops more evident than in the intraisland market system, of which women were the backbone.

The Intraisland Marketplace

> As far as the eye could reach there were files of men and women with their heads loaded, moving peaceably forward. From the cross paths leading through the estates, the busy marketers were poring into the high way. Sometimes they passed us in companies, and again they lined the edge of the road single file. To their heads as usual was committed to the safe convience of the various commodities. It was amusing to observe the almost infinite diversity of products which loaded them.[194]

This scene, as described by an American visitor to the island, was a weekly tradition of the laboring class' creation- the internal market system. Despite the plantocracy's monopoly on land ownership and agriculture, Afro-Barbadian laboring women created and maintained agricultural markets outside of total planter control. As the previous examples have demonstrated, it was not just the value of the crop itself that made access to land important for laborers, but the laborers' mobilization of the crop. Nowhere was this more evident than in the intra-island market system which brought agricultural goods into a communal network of exchange. While enslaved communities frequently traded and exchanged foodstuffs with one another throughout the centuries of slavery in Barbados, this practice expanded to a larger scale in the final decades of slavery. In contrast to the previous system of trade, the market system was monetary based and operated with cash. The monetary market emerged from the common practice of enslavers, primarily in Bridgetown, sending their enslaved laborers to the streets to sell goods ranging from clothing to food in order to generate profit.[195] This practice of

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[194] Joseph H. Kimball & James A. Thome. *Emancipation in the West Indies: a six months' tour in Antigua, Barbadoes, and Jamaica, in the year 1837*, (New York: American Anti-Slavery Society, 1838,) 95460, Archives of Latin American and Caribbean History, Sixteenth to Twentieth Century, Huntington Library, 269.

[195] Sidney Martin Greenfield, "Family Organization in Barbados," (doctoral dissertation, Columbia University, 1959), 40.; Frederick William N. Bayley, *Four Years Residence in the West Indies,* (London: William Kidd, 1830), 65.

exchanging goods for cash was adopted by enslaved communities, especially in the later years of slavery when cash became both more obtainable and important to the enslaved.

Huckstering

Women were absolutely central to the market system, primarily given their roles as Hucksters. Similar to its neighboring islands, in Barbados, the intraisland markets relied on the unique profession of 'huckstering' which was performed almost exclusively by women. Hucksters were the blood to the market's life- each week, they brought goods from across the island into common spaces of trade, where they sold off the goods that they carried on their heads. Former fieldworkers sought out huckstering as an alternative to plantation labor, and even those women still employed on plantations brought their produce to the market as hucksters. Aside from sex work, huckstering was one of the few viable employment opportunities off of the plantation for women of the agricultural classes. The taxation records verify that emancipation brought many women to the profession with the number of hucksters following August 1st, 1834, charting so high that they sometimes ran "quite literally, off the books."[196]Huckstering allowed Afro-Barbadian women to become more independent than through work offered as field laborers or domestic servants and was potentially one of the most lucrative options available to women.[197]

Huckstering was a specialized skill that required both knowledge and experience to do successfully. Women with connections, experience, and knowledge about certain estates and plantations could use their positions to increase profits. Hucksters played a unique middle role

[196] Melanie Newton. "New Ideas of Correctness: Gender, amelioration and emancipation in Barbados, 1810s-50s" *Slavery and Abolition* 21, no.3(2008): 108.

[197] Newton, 109.

between the cultivator and the consumer or shop owner, and had to understand both in order to fulfill her job successfully.[198]When the produce she sold was her own or that belonging to her family, the job could reap high profits because the entire payment for the produce would go to her and her family. But many hucksters also purchased goods from laborers outside of their kinship ties, in which cases a greater risk was assumed. Having to purchase their produce first, and then bring it to market, hucksters risked losing their investment if the goods did not sell. Spoilage, lack of customers, or having to sell at lower-than-expected prices could leave a huckster with a net loss at the end of the week. In an oral history testimony, a huckster from Tobago shared her experience in the profession in the early twentieth century:

> With trafficking you never know what will happen, sometimes there were problems with the boat, so you didn't get to travel to Trinidad and all your goods spoil. Sometimes the crops not ready for market. I had to pay somebody with a cart or transport to bring some of the goods on the wharf for me. Sometimes the man set me up and don't show up. Is just to burst tears. Then is the back and forth every week, your body use to feel it. But the money from Trinidad was good! But you are just never sure, so I had to keep other work. just in case. I had my children to take care of, so the week I didn't get to go to Trinidad, we will still eat because I have another set of money coming in.[199]

Despite the geographic and temporal separation, this story demonstrates the range of hurdles hucksters had to anticipate and navigate in their positions. The job relied on a multitude of external factors beyond the immediate control of the huckster. To mitigate these risks, hucksters had to creatively approach challenges and anticipate potential issues. It was for this reason that huckstering relied on a set of physical, knowledgeable, and social skills to navigate the market system successfully.

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[198] Khadene Harris. "A Heritage from Below," *Small Axe* 77, (July 2025): 121-130. 10.1215/07990537-12022394

[199] Quote from oral history conducted by Joseph O'Neil, in "Sustenance and Survival," New West Indian Guide 96, vol.3-4(2022), 266-289.

Hucksters employed West African traditions in transporting their produce to the market. The markets brought a weekly mass migration of plantation workers to the towns to buy and sell produce. One witness account describes the scene: "As far as the eye could reach there were files of men and women with their heads loaded, moving peaceably forward."[200]Hucksters had to successfully transport a variety of goods, from fresh produce, bottles of beer, to even live animals to the market, sometimes walking miles from the estates to town. To bring these goods long distances, most women carried them on their heads, a practice that was common both in Britain and in West Africa for the time period. In fact, both the Afro-Barbadian laborers and the poor white class of island inhabitants practiced this strategy in Barbados, although there might have been some differences in the tools used by these two groups to do so.[201] Edwina Ashie-Nokoi has suggested that laborers used the apawa, a type of board used in Southern Ghana to assist women in carrying things atop their heads.[202] A man named Frederick Bayley, visiting the West Indies just prior to emancipation, described seeing these apawas in Bridgetown as women passed by with "wooden trays" atop their heads, filled with articles for sale.[203] However, images of Afro-Barbadian women in the early twentieth century show not the apawa, but instead illustrate women using cloth kerchiefs to support the heavy items on their heads, as was the common strategy for agricultural peasants in Europe in the pre-industrial era.[204] This example

[200] Kimball and Thome, *Emancipation West Indies,* 269.

[201]Jane Whittle, "Why Do Women Carry things on Their Heads?," *Women's Work in Rural England, 1500-1700*, January 11, 2023, https://earlymodernwomenswork.wordpress.com/2016/02/23/why-do-women-carry-things-on-their-heads/.

[202] Ashie-Nikoi, "Africanisms in Barbadian Culture," 83.

[203] Frederick William N. Bayley, *Four Years Residence in the West Indies,* (London: William Kidd, 1830), 60-61.
[204] Whittle, "Women Carry things."

illustrates how traditional practices carried from West Africa persisted upon emancipation, but that throughout the nineteenth century some of these took on colonial adaptations.

Just as figure 5 depicts, the transportation of live animals to the market was a common practice for hucksters. One British observer of the internal market described the abundance of animals in this market scene:



Figure 7 '"Busy Barbados": Going to Market with Poultry.' Center for Research in Black Culture, Jean Blackwell Hutson Research and Reference Division, New York Public Library Digital Collections, httpt://digitalcollections.nyply.org/items/510d47df-8d39-a3d9-e040-e00a1864a99.

> Here was one woman (the majority were females, as usual with the marketers in these islands) with a small black pig doubled up under her left arm. Another girl had a brood of young chickens with nest, coop, and all on her head. Further along the road we were specially attracted by a woman who was trudging with an immense turkey elevated on her head. He quite filled the tray; head and tail projecting beyond its bounds. He advanced, as was very proper, head foremost, and it was irresistibly laughable to see him ever and anon

> stretch out his neck and peck under the tray as though he would discover by what manner of locomotive it was that he got along so fast while his own legs were tied together.[205]

Although humorous in his delivery, this account reveals how hucksters often transported living animals on their person on the way to the market. As discussed, livestock were extremely valuable to laboring populations because they produced manure for fertilizing personal plots, generated animal protein from milk, eggs, and meat, and functioned as personal property of cash worth. Their ability to sell at market was another advantage laborers held when keeping livestock and illustrates how these animals served as a form of savings bank for laboring families. Poultry could provide eggs and meat to feed the family while also producing offspring that could be sold at market for cash. It was the huckster's job to market these animals as desirable to the wide range of customers that attended the markets.

Huckstering: social knowledge and mobility

Making sales was central to the huckster occupation, as each saleswoman had to compete with the others to make her goods more desirable. Potential buyers were not limited to other Afro-Barbadians as both the wealthy white inhabitants and visitors alike purchased their produce from these women.[206] For a successful huckster, understanding the social attitudes of these customers was central to securing their business. These women understood the social and cultural norms constructed by colonial society, particulary around race, class, and communication and used this knowledge to appeal to the wealthy. Manners and gestures were heavily relied on to reinforce the hierarchal distinctions of Barbadian society, of which, placed wealthy and white islanders and visitors above impoverished Afro-Barbadians. Hucksters

[205] Kimball and Thome, 269-270.

[206] Greville, *Transatlantic Sketches West Indies, 35.*

acknowledge white visitors in the markets and on the streets, presenting them with curtsies and verbal greetings of respect.[207] By doing so, these women reaffirmed the potential customer of their self-imagined superiority in society, and consequently boost their esteem and egos as powerful and of a higher class. This strategy not only protected hucksters from offending a potential customer, but also encouraged sales by playing on the ego of the buyer. This tactic demonstrates hucksters' keen awareness of racial and class divisions in Barbadian society, and illustrates the clever manipulation of their own racial, classed, and gendered positions to further their own economic interests.

Huckstering was seen as an advantageous profession for laboring women given the mobility and the independence the job awarded. Prior to emancipation, many enslaved women turned to huckstering to escape slavery.[208]Because hucksters performed their work in the towns, runaway women were more easily able to conceal their identities and blend into the social chaos of the predominantly Afro-Barbadian landscape of Bridgetown or other smaller town centers. Hucksters' mobility expanded beyond the boundaries of the island at times, as the market system reached across islands and formed an inter-island network of exchange in the Eastern Caribbean.[209]Huckstering therefore awarded opportunities for runaway women to not only blend into their own island landscape, but to possibly disappear to a neighboring island. Historian Shauna Sweeney has called the internal market system's concealment and support of runaways

[207] Kimball and Thome, *Emancipation West Indies,* 229.

[208] Shauna J. Sweeney, "Market Marronage: Fugitive Women and the Internal Marketing System in Jamaica, 1781-1834," *The William and Mary Quarterly* 76, no.2(April 2019), Jstor.org/stable/10.5309/willmaryquar.76.2.0197; Harris, "Heritage from Below".

[209] Harriss, "Heritage from Below," 127.

"market marronage."[210] This made huckstering even more important in the Barbadian context given that the island's geography and development eliminated the possibility for rural maroon communities. The potential freedom offered by this economic system that existed outside of the total control of the plantocracy rendered it a powerful and important feature unique to Caribbean slavery.

The importance of the market to the laboring classes did not lessen with emancipation, as the mobility and independence that one stood to gain from the market extended into the post-slavery era in Barbados. As previously mentioned, huckstering was an incredibly desirable occupation for formerly enslaved women. With few other opportunities for agricultural laborers aside from fieldwork, huckstering was a viable way to make a living. It was not desirable just because of its separation from the plantation but offered women a chance to use their own skills and knowledge to turn a profit, while maintaining a mobile lifestyle. Huckster's networks expanded across the island and at times, across the region. Their mobility allowed for messages and news to spread along the networks of exchange, therefore emphasizing their roles as social and communal actors amongst the laboring classes.[211] Finally, the wages obtained by huckstering could render a laboring woman entirely independent of the plantation and of reliance on family. This gave women in this position a sense of security that rested more closely on their own actions than those of their partners or the attitude of a planter, therefore rendering them more independent and in control of their lives when compared to fieldworkers renting land.

Market and Huckster Regulation

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[210] Shauna J. Sweeney, "Market Marronage: Fugitive Women and the Internal Marketing System in Jamaica, 1781-1834," *The William and Mary Quarterly* 76, no.2(April 2019): 197-222. Jstor.org/stable/10.5309/willmaryquar.76.2.0197

[211] Candice Lee Goucher, *Congotay! Congotay: a global history of Caribbean food,* (London: Routledge, 2015), 134.

The freedom awarded by huckstering is further emphasized by the attempts of the Barbados legislature to limit the power of this position. The desire for field laborers to leave the plantation coupled with the independence that huckstering offered challenged the labor supply for planters. In response to this threat, the legislature enacted the "Act to Regulate the Sale of Goods, Wares, and Merchandise" in 1836.[212] This law imposed high taxes on hucksters and, in addition to the fees required for a license, mandated 'character references.'[213] The act had profound consequences for the possibilities available to women, while Afro-Barbadian men were still free to pursue trades without such gender-targeted barriers. Hucksters were further discouraged through social discourse that grouped together hucksters and prostitutes as "women perceived to be too far behind the pale of both the plantations and dependent female domesticity-than against any other aspect of ex-slaves' urban presence."[214] The systemic retaliation against hucksters is yet another example of planter-led efforts to keep Afro-Barbadians tied to plantation labor through deterring work that functioned independently of this system. Furthermore, the gender-based discrimination in targeting a women-dominated trade underscores the extent to which Afro-Barbadian women faced more barriers to socio-economic freedom than their male counterparts.

In addition to legislation restricting hucksters specifically, the legislature dually targeted the entire market system. The advantages the internal marketing system provided for Afro-Barbadians was not unknown to the planters, and several attempts were made by this class throughout the early-mid nineteenth century to regulate the market system. With the growth of

[212] Barbados. "Laws of Barbados: [1648-1874]" 1875. William Clowes and Sons, London. Harvard University. 24019077.

[213] Newton, "New Ideas of Correctness," 108.

[214] Newton, 109.

the internal marketing system in full swing, the Barbados legislature passed an act prohibiting the sale of goods at market on Sundays under the 1826 "Sunday and Marriage Act."[215] The act employed religious discourse, stating that the markets should not compete with observation of the sabbath. However, the relative lack of commitment to providing religious instruction for the enslaved during this time suggests that religious observation was merely the justification for the act, which was likely passed in response to the growing network of exchange that facilitated both social and economic community amongst the enslaved. Enslaved communities had begun to capitalize on the economic opportunity the market offered them and this paired with the market's role in facilitating runaways threatened the prosperity of plantation slavery. Similar acts to regulate markets occurred across other British West Indian islands as well. An 1831 act in Antigua for example, banned markets completely.[216] These restrictions on the market system underscore the extent to which the communal exchanges threatened planter power and autonomy and stood to advance the positions of (formerly) enslaved laboring classes.

However, because island markets were so advantageous and important to survival for Afro-Barbadian laboring communities, there was widespread resistance to the attempts to regulate them. Despite legislation aimed to control and prohibit weekly markets, these acts were largely ignored by laborers who continued to hold Sunday markets despite the 1826 legislation. The collective resistance to the market bans made enforcing the acts nearly impossible, and so Sunday markets continued both in Barbados and neighboring islands (although the markets did

[215] Jerome Handler and Diane Wallman, "Production Activities in the Household Economies of Plantation Slaves: Barbados and Martinique, Mid-1600s to Mid-1800s," International Journal of Historical Archaeology 18, no. 3 (June 18, 2014): 448.

[216] Taylar Charles, "'Come Wi Guh down Fi Guh Buy Banana': Transatlantic Slavery and Caribbean Farmers' Markets," *The University of Liverpool History Blog*, May 10, 2023, https://www.liverpool.ac.uk/history/blog/2023/transatlantic-slavery-and-caribbean-farmers-markets/.

eventually shift from being held on Sundays to Saturdays, a trend which took place across all British West Indian colonies). Resistance to regulation was also widespread across the region, with Afro-Caribbean laborers both ignoring and directly rebelling against the market acts. In Antigua for example, the market ban was met with revolts resulting in three weeks of martial law during which enslaved laborers burned down twenty-three estates.[217] The uniform resistance to the regulation of the market further underscores the importance this system held for Afro-Caribbean laborers who understood the opportunities it awarded them.

The Market and the Plot

The internal market system worked in tandem with the limited access laborers had to land via located labor, to create a system of exchange and community that strengthened laborers individual and family goals and necessities. Without the market system, it is possible that the use of small plots would have looked drastically different, given the opportunities for sale that were made available solely through this internal economy. The ability to turn crops, livestock, and processed foods into liquid cash gave agricultural laboring women the power to reap the benefit of their own labor, in a context in which they had been systemically dispossessed from owning the means of production. Generating cash from their rented plots transformed the provision plot into a site of economic production, in which women could monetarily benefit from their embodied expertise in agriculture. By doing so, these women defied their labels as 'unskilled' laborers, demonstrating that their agricultural labor extended beyond mere coerced movements. Instead, women's acquired skills allowed them to make informed decisions that maximized the productivity of their plots, while implementing flexibility as a strategy of survival.

[217] Charles, "Come Wi Buy Banana"

Conclusion

The very movements, processes, and knowledge that planters exploited from laboring women in the fields, allowed women and their children to survive and possibly escape the plantation for good. Just as hucksters used their agricultural and geographical knowledge to further their sales, located laboring women used their embodied expertise to grow crops for profit. In this way, laboring women used what they had acquired from their lives on the estate, to advance their own interests. Their labor, whether growing on their plot or transporting to market, was directly beneficial to themselves and their families. This reversal of agricultural labor as means to escape the estate rather than to produce wealth for it, can be read as a strategy of using the master's tools to dismantle the master's house.

V. LABORING MOTHERS: SOWING FUTURES

Martha was a formerly enslaved woman working on the Lion Castle Estate in the year 1840. While she and her fellow located laborers had been paying rent for the months of January through May, her employer stopped collecting rent for the remainder of the year and began subtracting rent payment from wages instead.[218]So when her child fell ill, Martha made the ultimate sacrifice and stayed home from work in order to tend to her kid. Illness was common among the laboring classes, and children were particularly susceptible to several of the common diseases, ailments, and complications associated with malnutrition, the tropical climate, and living conditions.[219] In an effort to save her child's life, Martha made the choice to give her time and labor to her sick child rather than to the estate. When the estate manager informed her that she was required to pay three days rent to the estate due to her absence from work, Martha likely could not afford to pay this request.

Martha's dilemma of being torn between working to save the life of her child and working to secure her house and land on the estate illustrates the continuous demand of labor from women in this class, often for competing purposes. For Martha and other women like her, the demand and constraints placed on her labor were dictated by her position in Barbadian society; first as a member of the praedial class, then as a person of African descent, and finally as a woman. At the intersection of these three identifiers, laboring women were unique in the challenges they faced in post-emancipation life.

[218] Barbados, 1841, Despatches: Proceedings before the Court Appeal, July 1840 - December 1841, CO28/141, The National Archives, London, England, p.184.

[219] Tara A. Inniss, "From Slavery to Freedom: Children's Health in Barbados, 1832-1838," Slavery and Abolition 27, no.2(August 2006): 253. 10.1080/01440390600765672

Laboring Women: At the Intersection

Race and Class

The institution of slavery was both predicated on and justified by a racialization of Black bodies as hierarchically inferior to whites, therefore inscribing blackness as a determination of social status in Barbados. The abolition of slavery, despite legally declaring that no human could be reduced to property, did not change these racial connotations. Afro-Barbadians did have some access to social mobility following emancipation, particularly those who were free prior to 1838 and were able to labor for wages which permitted their economic growth into the merchant classes.[220] Yet, for the majority of Barbadians of African descent, their racial positions prevented them from reaching a higher socioeconomic status. The discrepancies in class, while tied to race, were therefore not mutually exclusive to race, particularly following emancipation. This makes class an equally important site of social organization, given the ways in which it marked the economic, social, and political power available to Barbadians.

The poor white peasant communities on the island, for example, illustrate how race and class were at times not as correlational as the system of slavery would suggest. These communities descended from indentured servants who labored for the first colonial settlements on the island, primarily comprised of poor Irish, Scottish, and English peasants and prisoners.[221] As wealthy Europeans developed the plantation system and imported enslaved labor from Africa, the descendants of indentured servants lost employment opportunities and land, causing many to migrate North to the American mainland. Those who stayed in Barbados were "trapped as poor

[220]Hilary Beckles, *Great House Rules: Landless Emancipation and Workers' Protest in Barbados 1838-1938,* (Kingston: Ian Randle Publishers, 2004), 3-4.

[221] David Lambert, "Liminal Figures: poor whites, freedmen, and racial reinscription in colonial Barbados," *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space 19*, (2001): 335-350, P.341. DOI:10.1068/d37j

whites" and they remained poor, landless communities into the nineteenth century.[222] During their trip to the West Indies, a planter speaking with Americans Thome & Kimball noted of this white population that "they will beg of blacks more provident and industrious than themselves, or they will steal their poultry and rob their provision grounds at night; but they would disdain to associate with them."[223]

The reliance of poor white communities on the agricultural success of formerly enslaved communities underscores the extent to which this knowledge aided lower classes in their destitution and simultaneously captures the racial social circumstances that permitted white communities to steal from garden grounds without consequences. Therefore, poor white communities benefited from their whiteness in avoiding both racial discourse and the physical exploitation that the plantocracy forced upon Afro-Barbadians, even with class positions that prevented their socio-economic success in society. The status of the poor white communities as both socially and economically stunted and yet privileged in their relationship to slavery, underscores the extent to which race and class intersected for black laborers.

Conversely, the Afro-Barbadian population freed prior to the end of slavery held a higher economic status than laborers who were apprenticed through 1838. Afro-Barbadians who were manumitted or born to free parents were able to access jobs prior to their regulation in emancipation era. These included merchants, hucksters, sex work, porters, and tradesmen. Some Afro-Barbadian women, such as Raachel Pringle Polgreen, owned and operated brothels for

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[222] Lambert, "Liminal Figures," 341.

[223] Jospeh Kimball & James Thome. *Emancipation in the West Indies: a six months' tour in Antigua, Barbadoes, and Jamaica, in the year 1837.* New York: American Anti-Slavery Society, 1838, 95460, Archives of Latin American and Caribbean History, Sixteenth to Twentieth Century, Huntington Library, 229. link.gale.com/apps/doc/CY0101541353/LACH?u=euge94201&sid=bookmark-LACH&xid=75d99a3e&pg=1

which they purchased enslaved women, as a source of income.[224] This complicated the racial binaries of slavery and made class an important element of post-emancipation experiences. The coinciding restrictions placed on urban employment and the lack or resources available to enslaved/apprenticed populations left agricultural workers at a great socio-economic disadvantage at emancipation compared to previously freed Afro-Barbadians. Despite sharing racial identities, the opportunities available to freed Afro-Barbadians prior to 1838 gave them an advantage over agricultural laborers who were met with restrictive legislation upon emancipation. The difference in the socio-economic mobility of these two groups despite their shared racial background illustrates how class at the time of abolition affected the experience of emancipation for Afro-Barbadians.

Gender, Reproduction, and "Breeding"

Agricultural laboring women faced not just the compounding exploitation of their race and class, but challenges associated with their gendered positions as well. Comparing men of the same race and class as these women, highlights how gender influenced what was possible for formerly enslaved women. Women differed from their fellow agricultural laborers in experiencing violence not just from the planter and other higher classes, but from the men in their own communities as well. Black and white men[225] alike exerted physical control over laboring women's bodies through rape and sexual assault.[226] As one reformer-minded member of a planter family noted in his anonymous letters to the crown, "What a reproach to us that hardly

[224] Maris Fuentes, *Dispossessed Lives,* see Chapter Two for a full historical analysis of the life of Rachael Pringle Polgreen.

[225] Post-1838, it became socially unacceptable for a white man to have intimate relations with Afro-Barbadian women, because it was seen as an avenue for these women to advance their own socio-economic status.

[226] Jennifer Morgan, *Laboring Women: Reproduction and Gender in New World Slavery,* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004), 151.

one of our young females reach the years of puberty without being brought to shame and degradation!"[227]

Gender was racialized in Barbadian society primarily through the plantocracy's decision to reverse European parental law by assigning the socio-economic status of children to that of the mother's. This system was implemented under slavery, in order to ensure that any child born to an enslaved mother would be legally enslaved- regardless of the status of the father.[228] Control over women's reproductive capabilities became then a method through which enslavers could produce more labor for the estate. Throughout the first centuries of slavery in Barbados, the consistent arrival of enslaved Africans on the island was the primary way that enslavers maintained laboring populations under the high mortality rates. But following trade interruptions brought by the American Revolutionary War, a group of Barbadian planters co-published a manual in 1786, arguing that economic stability could be achieved on plantations through incentivizing reproduction. Rather than aiming to establish marriage for enslaved couples, which would be a strategy used several decades later, the manual argued that marriage would grant legal authority to husbands over their wives which would interfere with the power of enslavers over women laborers. Instead, the Barbadian planters suggested that offering financial and material incentives to enslaved women could increase reproduction and by extension, the enslaved population. These incentives included time off from work, extra land, and cash for women who gave birth.[229]

[227] Meliora. *Letters on the Labouring Population of Barbados*, (London: Bell and Dadly, 1858), 30.

[228] Elgersman Lee, "Remembering our Mothers," 42.

[229] Katherine Paugh, "The Politics of Childbearing in the British Caribbean and the Atlantic World During the Age of Abolition, 1776-1838, *Past & Present,* (2013): 137.

But at its core, enslaved women's bodies became a site of planter interest and control as childbearing became another way enslavers could extract wealth from the bodies of the enslaved. As Dorthy Roberts has described, "for slave women, procreation had little to do with liberty. To the contrary, Black women's childbearing in bondage was largely a product of oppression rather than an expression of self-definition and personhood."[230]Women often lacked agency in their own reproduction, as enslavers used rape to ensure women would continue to give birth. In fact, reclaiming control over their own reproduction was one way in which women resisted enslavers efforts to "breed" women and force their children into the same exploitation they faced themselves. Thome and Kimball's discussion with an anonymous Barbadian planter during the apprenticeship period, highlights how women reclaimed agency over their own reproduction and children:

> '*there is a bush*' said he, '*which has committed many a murder*.' On requesting him to explain, he said, that the root of it was a most deadly poison, and that the slave women used to make a decoction of it and give it to their infants to destroy them; many a child had been murdered in this way. Mothers would kill their children, rather than see them *grow up to be slaves*.[231]

Not only does this phenomenon indicate additional plant knowledge possessed by enslaved women, but it highlights women's resistance to the plantocracy's exploitation of their bodies to extract more labor and wealth. Women refused to birth children that they did not choose to conceive and over whom they had no control, as an enslaved child did not belong to their mother- but to the estate. Abortion and infanticide in this context reflect resistance, grief, and anger of women subjected to rape and stripped of agency in motherhood. The emphasis on

[230] Dorothy Roberts. *Killing the Black Body : Race, Reproduction, and the Meaning of Liberty*. (New York: First Vintage Books, 2000): chapter one.

[231] Thome & Kimball, *Emancipation in the West Indies,* 234.

reproduction was therefore not just a matter of material incentives for enslaved mothers, but in the domination and exploitation of women's bodies to the benefit of the estate.

The early emphasis on reproduction placed the colony in a unique position upon the closing of the slave trade in 1807, as "Barbados was the only British sugar colony in the Caribbean to have a self-reproducing slave society."[232]. While other islands saw their labor forces decline, Barbados was the colony in which the slave population increased.[233] In the 1820s, other British colonies began implementing similar "privileges" for mothers under amelioration acts. "British politicians viewed the West Indian Colonies as an appropriate testing ground for governmental regulation of reproduction,"[234] as highlighted by historian Katherine Paugh. Abolitionists and Caribbean planters alike supported amelioration acts that aimed to increase the quality of life for enslaved communities and by extension support survival and reproduction. Abolitionists argued that there was no need for slavery with a repopulating work force, and planters benefitted from increased labor. Unlike the strategies of Barbadian planters at the end of the eighteenth century, amelioration acts began legalizing marriage between enslaved men and women as a method to encourage reproduction. The first acts in the region were passed in 1823, but Barbados would not legalize marriage until 1826. The Barbadian marriage act was among the most restrictive, with clauses prohibiting cross-plantation unions and requiring extra steps for marriage certificates.[235] According to Paugh, the passing of marriage acts in the British Caribbean was one of the key solidifiers of abolition because it indicated a transition to

[232] Innis, "From Slavery to Freedom," 251.

[233] Juanita de Barros, *Reproducing the British Caribbean: Sex, Gender, and Population Politics after Slavery,* (University of North Carolina Press: 2014): 32.

[234] Paugh, "The Politics of Childbearing," 137.

[235] Katherine Paugh, *The Politics of Reproduction,* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017): 184.

Malthusian free labor, and "allowed planters to transfer the costs of reproduction to parents, and particularly mothers."[236] Barbadian planters' aversion to enslaved marriages can therefore be understood as an effort to delay abolition. The final decade of slavery in Barbados for enslaved women therefore brought an increase in "privileges" alongside an increased emphasis on the domination over and exploitation of women's bodies in order to advance the desires of the estate.

Mothering From the Plantation

The 1834 abolition of slavery and transition to apprenticeship underscores the extent to which the "pronatalist" policies had been implemented to delay emancipation. Upon the freeing of the roughly 14,000 children under the age of 6 on August 1, 1834, many planters simultaneously removed the policies that had been supporting mothers and their children over the past few decades.[237] Throughout the four-year period of Apprenticeship, parents could choose to apprentice their free children and in exchange receive the food rations and other accommodations that planters were required to dole out to their laborers. However, parents overwhelming rejected apprenticing their children, and planters responded by creating conditions that they hoped would force parents to change their minds.[238]

While many planters refused food provisions to children not apprenticed to the estate, some went as far as to prohibit laborers from keeping their freed children on the plantation at all. Several reports from apprenticeship detail cases of planters ejecting infants and young children from their parents' cottages on the estate, in what must have been unimaginable heartbreak for

[236] Paugh, "The Politics of Childbearing," 159.

[237] Laurence Brown and Tara Inniss, "The Slave Family in the Transition to Freedom: Barbados, 1834-1841," *Slavery and Abolition* 26, no. 2(August 2005): 259.

[238] Melanie Newton, *The Children of Africa in the Colonies: Free People of Color in Barbados in the Age of Emancipation,* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2008), 148.

their apprenticed parents who remained tethered to the plantation.[239] Yet, in other cases, parents themselves sent their children away, as Thome and Kimball reported in 1837, "the planters have no control over the children born on their estates; and in many instances their parents have sent them away lest their residence on the property should by some chance, give the planter a claim upon their services."[240]This passage underscores how parents were skeptical of planters and did not trust that their children would be free from forced labor under the new system. Parents were taking measures to ensure that their children would remain free, a reality that they had not yet even experienced themselves. By refusing to apprentice their children, mothers demonstrated that they were committed to abandoning agricultural plantation labor even at the cost of physical separation from their children. Planter refusal to feed or house the free children therefore resulted both directly and indirectly in their deaths, and the high fertility rates of the period were met with a staggering increase in infant and child mortality.

Losing allowances and protections gained in the final decades of their enslavement, laboring mothers faced dozens of renewed struggles that emerged in the emancipation landscape. Mothers were now torn between their families at home and their employment on the plantation in ways that they had previously been able to navigate. For example, by the turn of the nineteenth century, it was common practice to allow nursing mothers to leave the fields to feed their infants

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[239] Sturge, Joseph and Thomas Harvey. The West Indies in 1837; being the journal of a visit to Antigua, Montserrat, Dominica, St. Lucia, Barbadoses, and Jamaica; Undertaken fro the Purpose of Ascertaining the Actual Condition of the Negro Population of Those Islands. London: Hamilton, Adams, and co. 1838. Library of Congress; americana.The Library of Congress. P.3. https://archive.org/details/westindiesin183700stur_0/page/n19/mode/2up?ref=ol; Innis, "From Slavery to Freedom," 256.

[240]Jospeh Kimball & James Thome. *Emancipation in the West Indies: a six months' tour in Antigua, Barbadoes, and Jamaica, in the year 1837.* New York: American Anti-Slavery Society, 1838, 95460, Archives of Latin American and Caribbean History, Sixteenth to Twentieth Century, Huntington Library, 267. link.gale.com/apps/doc/CY0101541353/LACH?u=euge94201&sid=bookmark-LACH&xid=75d99a3e&pg=1

and when women returned to work, the estate arranged for their children's care through designating someone, typically an older enslaved woman, to watch over the babies.[241]But in the transition to the located labor system, planters began to punish and fine laborers for their absence from work- including mothers who left the fields to feed or care for their children. Several cases in the Court of Appeal in the first decade of emancipation, including Martha's story, involve disputes between planters and laborers wherein laboring women were required to pay the estate for their absence from work when caring for their sick child.[242]Similarly, on some plantations mothers were required to pay the estate for the time they took off of work to give birth.[243] The lack of flexibility given to mothers and their children in emancipation era stands in stark contrast to the pronatal polices of the final decades of slavery. The stricter regulations on women's bodies and removed and reduced resources and privileges for pregnant women and mothers can help explain the stark increase in infant mortality following 1834.

Laboring women were therefore placed in a near impossible position of raising children, with little to no help from their places of work, all while having to give the estate a minimum of 45 hours of labor each week. Because estates handled emancipation differently, some did offer relief to mothers under this impossible context. On the Lascelles' estates for example, throughout apprenticeship "each woman with a child under the age of two was permitted to nurse it for three hours a day, while married women were exempted from work before breakfast, […] presumably in order for them to have time to organize a meal or care for their families."[244]On other estates

[241] Innis, "From Slavery to Freedom," 257.

[242] Barbados, 1841, Despatches: Proceedings before the Court Appeal, July 1840 - December 1841, CO28/141, The National Archives, London, England, 182-185.

[243]Innis, "From Slavery to Freedom," 257.

[244] Innis, "From Slavery to Freedom," 257-258.

however, little sympathy was given to women who were pregnant or to those who had infants. On many plantations, for example, women were expected to continue their nine-hour daily shifts in the field, even in the first gangs, up until the moment they gave birth.[245]The variations in allowances and treatment of mothers and their infants highlights the tension between colonial perceptions of motherhood and domesticity, the planter incentive to maintain excess laborers, and the plantation system's reliance on women for field labor.

Upon emancipation, marriage between Afro-Barbadians was made more accessible by the colony, likely to raise the perceived status of the freed population to British officials. Marriage legally tied fathers to their children; yet the expectation for childcare continued to be placed on mothers. Furthermore, marriage remained extremely rare, as most Afro-Barbadian relationships never extended beyond common law unions. The practice of polygamy, brought from West Africa, persisted among laboring populations and can help explain some of the resistance to marriage for these communities. Additionally, historian Melanie Newton has argued that Afro-Barbadian women were reluctant to participate in marriage because they were aware of the ways in which Christian marriage limited their personal freedom by subjecting them to legal insubordination to their husbands.[246]So while the legal framework for assigning fathers' responsibility over their children existed, mothers remained largely responsible for their children's status and care in practice.

The white planter elite justified the maternal responsibility for children as a reaction to the extent to which women had children with multiple different fathers. The Barbadian

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[245] Johnston and Barrett, *The Present Condition of the Negro Population in the British Colonies: particularly in relation to the working of the apprenticeship system established under the "Act for the Abolition of Slavery,"* (London: Printed by Johnston & Barrett: Sold by William Ball, 1837), 19.

[246] Melanie Newton, *The Children of Africa in the Colonies: Free People of Color in Barbados in the Age of Emancipation,* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2008), 92.

legislatures' claims of significant amounts of "illegitimate" children, portrayed women as active agents in birthing children from different fathers, erasing the power over Black women's bodies that likely influenced many of these births.[247] The New Poor Law of 1834 directly placed the responsibility of children born out of wedlock onto women alone by "eliminating provisions which had previously allowed such women to pursue maintenance from the child's father."[248] So while marriage threatened the agency women had over their own lives, it was also an avenue through which women could seek legal assistance in raising their children. Women were once again trapped in a difficult legal dilemma between submitting to patriarchal marriage norms or bearing sole financial responsibility for their children. The erasure of the violence underlying so-called "illegitimate" births, the legal requirement that women bear sole responsibility for their children, and the patriarchal nature of marriage, reflects the gendered realities Afro-Barbadian women were forced to navigate. These assertions also point to the colonial assumption of Afro-Barbadian fathers' absence in raising children and do not account for the socio-cultural reasons laborers may have rejected marriage, as previously discussed. By juxtaposing the family and reproductive patterns of laboring communities with those of British republican values, planters and colonial magistrates crafted a dehumanizing racial narrative that portrayed Black women as promiscuous, undignified, and therefore not deserving of the same place in society as the republican white woman. Planters then used this racial narrative to justify the continuation of Afro-Barbadian women's field labor in face of the growing social expectation in Europe for women to occupy the domestic.

[247] Meliora, *Letters on the Labouring Population.*

[248] Katherine Paugh, *The Politics of Reproduction,* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017): 234.

Mothering from the Plot

In the colonial archive, agricultural laboring mothers bear the brunt of the blame for the perceived colonial failings of emancipation society. Magistrate reports, visitor remarks and observations, and even critical letters sent to the Crown during the initial decades of emancipation all point fingers at those Afro-Barbadian women in agricultural pursuits. The massive mortality and destitution of children following the colonial decision to free those under six before their parents could enjoy the same, was reduced to simple claims that "infants have been greatly neglected by their mothers."[249]These perspectives clearly ignored the impossibility for women to raise their children without a labor contract and the coinciding removal of systems that aided mothers in raising their kids.

Teaching Agriculture

Despite the colonial archive's gross reduction of the failings of emancipation society to a discourse of 'neglect' of mothers to their children, the actions of these laboring women tell a different story. Formerly enslaved women used their newly freed status to maximize opportunities with the goal of keeping their children protected from the system that had held them hostage and left them to a lifetime in the cane fields. The planter's perceived refusal of mothers to "train their children to agricultural pursuits"[250]reduced 'agricultural pursuits' to that of plantation labor. Citing an 'ignorant' child population, the colonial archive insisted that laboring mothers kept their children from the soil entirely, refusing to allow them to lift so much as a hoe. However, these claims are contained to the training of cane cultivation on the

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[249] Barbados, Jan-Aug 1839, Despatches: Apprentices Part I, Governor Sir C. T. M. Macgregor, 2 November, 1838-25 November, 1839, CO28/130, The National Archives, London, England, 307.

[250] Barbados, Apr 1839- Mar 1840, Despatches: Apprentices, CO28/131, The National Archives, London, England, 211.

plantation, as mothers did indeed refuse to have their children give their physical labor to an estate that gave as little as possible in return. But to say that mothers kept their children from agriculture entirely is to ignore the critical and foundational mothering that was performed in the home plot.

Mothers used the space of the rented plot to train and employ their children in important agricultural skills. As discussed, cultivation of the home plot was the cornerstone of survival for agricultural laborers. Knowledge of which plants to grow, how and when to grow them, and the best use of the reaped crop could decide alone the success and survival of a laborer and their family. Knowing this, the future survival of laboring women's children could depend on the extent of their knowledge of plant cultivation. For this reason, Afro-Barbadian laboring women kept their children on the home plot where they could teach them these foundational skills and understandings.[251] Mothers brought their children alongside them as they planned, plowed, planted, weeded, and harvested their tenantries. Training children in home plot cultivation provided extra labor towards the growing of food for sale and export, as children could complete crucial tasks while their mother was working her shift for the estate. Labor that would typically be completed late at night or early in the morning, could then be done during the day by children who had no other work obligations competing for their time or energy. By employing their kids in home cultivation, women saved energy and time while increasing the productivity of their rented plots. This practice doubled as an important lesson for children who would soon assume their own labor contracts and use their own rented plots for provision and profit. Therefore, the rented plot became an important site for mother-child relationships as children learned valuable

[251] Barbados, Apr 1839- Mar 1840, Despatches: Apprentices, CO28/131, The National Archives, London, England, 160.

skills while increasing their household income and stability by increasing land productivity through their added labor.

Profit and Provision

Mothers also used their own knowledge of plants, medicines, and the market to raise their children. The choice to plant canes, or to bring provisions to market rather than retaining them for home consumption, are both strategies used by laboring women to further separate their children from the estate. While planting provisions allowed women to feed themselves and their children, survival was not equivalent to progress. Adequately feeding children of course permitted their growth and survival in the tropical climate and physical labor in the garden. But it was currency, not food, that would increase the chances of a life outside of plantation labor.

Wages permitted women to pay for training that increased employment options for their children. Employment opportunities outside of cane field labor were both limited and gendered.

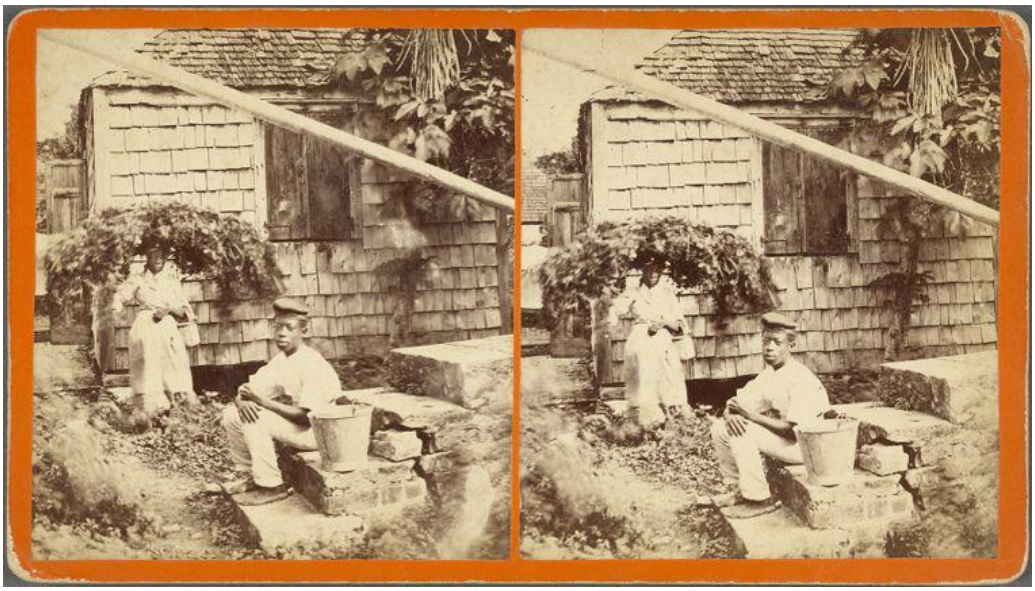


*Fig. 8 "*Sleeping [Nideri]" Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, Photographs and Prints Division, The New York Public Library. New York Public Library Digital Collections. https://digitalcollections.nypl.org/items/84ad1dc0-c5eb-012f-4acd-58d385a7bc34

Women frequently turned to huckstering, domestic employment, sex work, or trades such as

seamstresses. Men had fewer opportunities in the domestic sphere but could find work in many skilled trades from blacksmiths, to maritime traders, or carpenters.[252] These more desirable professions in the trades required specific skilled training, often only achievable with adequate wages to support oneself throughout an apprenticeship. It was incredibly difficult for a laborer of the praedial class to lift their social standing, as the children of those in the class of tradesmen had a significant advantage in their waged positions to enroll their own children in school or apprenticeships to trades.[253] However, agricultural laboring mothers creatively approached their plots of land to generate wages that could be used to send their children for training in trades.

Skillfully dedicating at least a portion of their rented plots to the cultivation of crops for export allowed mothers to further their children's chances at a life without field labor. While cane was the most valuable of the crops for export and often planted for the sole purpose of reaping its export value, the crop did pose risks. The growing cycle of the cane confined its harvesting to only once a year, leaving valuable land trapped in cane cultivation for the majority of the growing season. Cane also threatened planters, as illustrated by Betsy Cleaver's case, because the sheer profitability of it could elevate the socio-economic position of laborers or their children beyond the need to complete fieldwork for the plantation. Because laborers were the ones who possessed the embodied knowledge to cultivate cane, planters felt the need to constrain the extent to which these populations could grow the crop on their own account.

With cane as more vulnerable to scrutiny as a visible threat and competition to planters, laboring women turned to other cash crops as a means to collect wages for their children's future. Secondary to sugar, was the exportation of aloes, ginger, pimento, and arrowroot from

[252] Colonial Office and predecessors: Barbados, Original Correspondence. AM Colonial Caribbean. The National Archives, London, England, 173.

[253] Barbados, 1836, Despatches, Offices and Individuals, CO28/118, The National Archives, London, England.

Barbados.[254] These crops did not sell for as much as the cane, but they were still profitable and had several other advantages. There are several recorded instances of enslaved populations utilizing ginger and aloes for their medicinal properties in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries.[255]Aloes were used by Barbadians of all class and racial distinctions from as early as the seventeenth century, to treat several aliments, particulary burns or rashes.[256]Their use extended beyond the region as well, creating demand overseas for medicinal aloes which the laborers could sell to. While ginger and aloes could generate profit at the market, they also served useful for Afro-Barbadian laboring families as medicinal, providing another incentive to their cultivation.

Arrowroot was similarly grown by the formerly enslaved population for export. Indigenous to the region, the plant was initially recorded by British colonials as being used by AmerIndian populations a remedy for poison.[257]The plant eventually gained recognition as an alternative for other starches, and by the late eighteenth century, demand grew for arrowroot overseas in Europe and in the continental United States. Although there is some evidence of Barbadian planters growing the starch on their estates, the archival documents do not reflect any extensive cultivation of the plant on plantations for export. While the plant remained grouped in with other exports of minor importance at the turn of the nineteenth century, its demand in

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[254] Barbadian Blue Books, 1839-1872, 73235C-01, 498, Caribbean Colonial Statistics from the British Empire, 1824-1950, British Online Archives, London, https://britishonlinearchives.com/collections/73/volumes/498/barbados-1839-1947

[255]Jerome S. Handler and JoAnn Jacoby. "Slave Medicine and Plant Use in Barbados." *Journal of the Barbados Museum and Historical Society* 41, (1993): 74-98, 83.

[256] Sonia Peter, "Medicinal and Cooling Teas of Barbados," in *African Ethnobotany in the Americas,* ed. by Robert Voeks & John Rashford, (New York: Springer, 2013), 302.

[257] Jerome S Handler and JoAnn Jacoby "Slave Medicine and Plant Use in Barbados," *Journal of the Barbados Museum and Historical Society* 41, (1993).

Europe and the United States drove up the exportation of arrowroot in the initial decades after the turn of the century, with export production peaking in the mid 1820s.[258] The lack of notation for arrowroot from plantations records indicate that these exports were largely derived from the plots of laborers themselves, rather than from the estates.

Arrowroot had several benefits to the Afro-Barbadian women who chose to grow it around their homes. Because arrowroot did not compete with planter sugar, formerly enslaved women most likely capitalized on this market with little restriction or competition with the planter class. Arrowroot therefore stood as a profitable export for laborers looking to make some cash, without fear of planter interference in their plots (as was so often experienced when cultivating canes). When unable to sell at market or in times where extra provisions were needed, women could utilize their harvested arrowroot for themselves and their families. The caloric starch could be used as thickeners in soups, and could substitute other starches in cake, biscuit, and pudding recipes. Records from Jamaica and St. Vincent indicate that arrowroot starch was made into a jelly that was then mixed boiling water and milk. This slurry was given to nursing or recently weaned infants as a sort of baby formula.[259] Formula was important for laboring women raising infants because oftentimes, laboring women's living conditions made it challenging to produce milk. This can be attributed to the physical exertion of women's coerced fieldwork, both while pregnant and postpartum, combined with the nutritional deficiencies they faced as part of the laboring classes. These challenges made lactation difficult and required mothers to find other sources of food for their children. It is likely that mothers therefore saw the cultivation of this

[258] J.S Handler, "The History of Arrowroot and the Origin of Peasantries in the British West Indies," *Journal of Caribbean History* 2, (May 1971).

[259] Handler, "History of Arrowroot," 52.

crop as advantageous, given the multiple possible uses of it from generating profit, to provisioning families, and especially in raising infants.

The Role of Plants in Infant Survival

With a staggering rate of infant mortality, that was among the highest in the entire West Indies for children under the age of five, keeping a child alive was a difficult task in itself.[260]Planters and physician reports from the nineteenth century suggested that a great number of infant deaths within the first nine days of life could be attributed to neo-natal tetanus which they assumed resulted from an improper removal of the umbilical cord. However, neo-natal tetanus has similar symptoms to neo-natal tetany which is caused by calcium, magnesium and vitamin D deficiencies, leading historian Kenneth Kiple to conclude this condition as more likely responsible for the infant deaths given the likelihood of calcium-deficient mothers.[261]

The link between infant mortality and nutrition therefore contextualizes the importance of the rented plot in providing key nutrients that would ensure infant survival. Crops not grown or valued in plantation fields but widely grown in laborer rented plots, including cassava, pigeon pea, and papaya, contain calcium and other nutrients that could support pregnant and breastfeeding mothers.[262]The nutritional value of these crops were extremely important given the relative lack of vitamins available in the staples of laborer's diets, namely maize, sorghum, and

[260] Innis, "From Slavery to Freedom," 252.

[261] Kenneth Kiple, *The Caribbean Slave: A Biological History.* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984.), p.297. As cited in Innis, "From Slavery to Freedom," 253.

[262] Siti Raudhah Noor Shifa Putri Mohidin, Said Moshawih, & Long Chiau Ming, "Cassava (*Manihot esculenta* Crantz): A Systemic Review for the Pharmacological Activities, Traditional Uses, Nutritional Values, and Phytochemistry," *Journal of Evidence-Based Integrative Medicine* 28, (2023): doi:10.1177/2515690X231206227; A.O. Aroh, K.I. Omoniyi, & F.R. Mohammed, "Determination of Vitamin C and Mineral Context of Two Local Species of *Carioca papaya* (Samba and Hortus Gold Papaya) at Various Stages of Ripening," *FUDMA Journal of Sciences* 7, no. 1(2023): 280-283, DOI: https://doi.org/10.33003/fjs-2023-0701-2051; Abdulmajid Haji et. al, "Nutritional Composition, Bioactive Compounds, Food Applications, and Health Benefits of Pigeon Pea (*Cajanus cajan* L. Millsp.): A Review," *Legume Science* 6, no. 2(2024): https://doi.org/10.1002/leg3.233.

imported wheat flour and bread.[263] Rented plots therefore supplied the nutritional medicine capable of helping raise healthy children.

Plots could also provide plant remedies for injuries and sicknesses. When children did get sick, women used their medicinal knowledge paired with plants either growing on the plot or in the peripheries to treat these illnesses. It could be likely that women were specifically cultivating these medicinal plants in plots but were not compensated for these plants upon appraisal given the colonial magistrates unfamiliarity with them. Some of the medicinal knowledge used by women in treating their children and communities was rooted in West African belief systems, such as the practices of harvesting plant material at specific times, leaving extracts in the dew to increase potency, and treating plants magically before they could be used effectively.[264]Women also relied on medicinal plants and practices that were carried over from West Africa.

Martha likely turned to her plant knowledge during her three days home with her sick child. One possible plant she could have used to treat a fever, is the rosary pea. This plant has been found to have parallel medicinal uses in West Africa and among Afro-Caribbean communities alike. The small red bean marked with a black dot, has been used in both regions as a fever reducer, cough suppressant, and as a treatment for eye issues including granular lids and pannus.[265] It is even more likely that Martha and other mothers in her situation would use the castor bean when faced with a sick child. The castor bean had widespread use throughout the West Indies, as both a topical and ingested treatment. Martha would have likely given her child

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[263] Barbados, Jan-Aug 1839, Despatches: Apprentices Part I, Governor Sir C. T. M. Macgregor, 2 November, 1838-25 November, 1839, CO28/130, The National Archives, London, England, 240.

[264] Sonia Peter, "Medicinal and Cooling Teas of Barbados," in *African Ethnobotany in the Americas,* ed. by Robert Voeks & John Rashford, (New York: Springer, 2013), 288.

[265]Susan A. McClure, "Parallel Usage of Medicinal Plants by Africans and Their Caribbean Descendants," *Economic Botany* 36, (1982), https://doi.org/10.1007/BF02858552, 294.

an oral dose of oil from the bean as a purge, which was a technique that had been used since ancient Egypt to flush toxins, waste, and sickness from the body. The plant was well-known in Barbados for its capability to cure colds and fevers. Afro-Caribbean women have also historically used castor bean themselves to promote the onset of childbirth and to stimulate milk production.[266] The use of the plant for gynecological reasons further highlights the bean's role in helping mothers raise their children, given its role in both bringing children into the world and in keeping them alive.

Knowledge and use of plant medicine alone was not enough to care for a sick child, as mothers had to have the time to gather and apply these treatments. Like Martha, they skipped their mandated work position, sacrificing wages, rations, and sometimes their rented plots. Even in cases in which laboring mothers were uninformed that their absence from work would result in rent fine, they were well aware that they would not receive wages or provisions that day due to their absence. When women chose to remain home to care for their children, it becomes clear that raising and loving a child in emancipation society, could not be done without sacrifices. These decisions mirror those taken by parents in their refusal to apprentice their children, despite the offered incentives of extra wages or provisions. Mothers were likely making judgement calls about what would be the best action to better their children's lives. It can be imagined then that women would only miss work to save the life of their child. This sacrifice further underscores that the near relentless cycle of work that laboring women completed each week was not done so to avoid raising children, nor to 'neglect domestic duties' as colonial reports so often accused them. But rather, the lives and futures of children remained at the center of the choices made by

[266] McClure, "Parallel Usage of Medicinal Plants," 296.

these mothers, who saw generating food and wages through their work as the most effective method for securing their children a better quality of life.

Kinship and Community

Women were not isolated, independent actors in managing their difficult position in Barbadian emancipation society. In fact, women aided their survival and that of their children through the creation and utilization of kinship and communal bonds that helped them navigate the various tasks placed upon them. From thoughtful marriage and household arrangements to the creation of their own childcare systems, the relationships women held with other members of the laboring classes helped them reduce the competing demands for their labor and increase opportunities for themselves and their families.

Strategic Family Structures

While the archival documents heavily criticize the relative lack of marriages formed between members of the laboring class, particularly in relation to the high birth rate, these claims erase the bonds that laborers made amongst themselves. Marriage was not common under slavery, and the practice was largely reserved for the higher classes. While religious instruction and churches slowly became more available to these classes in the initial decades of emancipation, agricultural laborers did not regularly attend due to the time and energy required to survive. So, while marriage was not accessible or culturally appropriate for many agricultural laborers, many members of this class did hold family bonds, including relationships that spanned across plantations.

The absence of the nuclear family structure in Barbados was a point of critique for many visiting British and reformer planters alike, but it was in fact advantageous for laboring families to separate across plantations. Betsy Cleaver for example, the located laborer who was ejected

for harvesting her canes against the estate manager's request, proved her husband's position on a neighboring estate advantageous. Firstly, Betsy sold her canes to her husband's estate in a moment where her own estate was threatening to punish her for growing her own. It is clear that her own estate would not purchase her crop, but from communicating with her husband she was able to make the sale. Similarly, when her own estate ejected her alongside her infirm uncle, Betsy likely moved herself and her uncle into her husband's cottage until she could find another contract. Had she and her husband been working on the same estate, there is a chance that the planter would not permit her to stay with him upon her ejectment out of spite. Therefore, by having her husband's contract on a neighboring estate, Betsy was likely able to find temporary relief from her ejectment. This dynamic illustrates how laboring women used their family connections for security and opportunity.

Women collaborated with their partners within the same household as well. Men had more opportunities for employment outside of fieldwork and received higher wages for the work they completed. If a man was employed to a more lucrative position, such as a trade work, merchant, or a porter, he would make more money, but he would not have access to land for housing. If he were to have a partner with a located laboring contract, he could have access to the plot and cottage while bringing in revenue to purchase foods, school,[267]goods, or other necessities. His partner would then work for the estate and maintain the home plot. This division of labor was described by a magistrate in 1839: "the wife or some other member of the family

[267] While access to education became more available upon emancipation, it remained inaccessible to many agricultural laborers who lacked time, money, or access to the limited opportunity as described by one magistrate :"Many of the first class of apprenticed labourers (viz. tradespeople) send their free children to school; but many of the ordinary field people have neither the time not opportunity, consequently their children are running about idle. They are supported upon a pittance of parents' allowance. With the exception of night-schools, which are attended by adults as well as children, who pay a small sum weekly, there is no other instruction afforded to the black population." (Barbados, 1836, Despatches, Offices and Individuals, CO28/118).

very commonly remains at home in charge of the cottage, or in working up the allotment."[268] It is not surprising that this division of labor emerged given the gendered employment and wage opportunities for men and the cultural and historical role of women to fulfill maintain the home plot. While Barbadian society had reaffirmed this division of labor through the assignment of fieldwork to women under slavery and the increased rate of wages for men, these roles also reflected traditional West African gender norms in which women typically worked in cultivation and food processing and preparation.[269]

Women did not just collaborate with their partners to increase security and productivity, but other members of their families. As seen with Betsy Cleaver's shelter and care of her infirm uncle, families frequently stuck together in forging households that supported those who could not support themselves. Since laborers working tirelessly were hardly able to support themselves, survival was even more difficult for those Afro-Barbadians who were unable to work. Whether due to old age, disability, or sickness, those who could not physically labor had little protection or aid in emancipation society. Just as they had done with the free children under apprenticeship, the plantocracy saw no financial benefit in offering relief to populations whose bodies could not generate profit for the estate. As Rev. Edward Pinder described in his anonymous letter: "I have known instances where old labourers, who have worked all their lives on one estate or another, have at last ended their days without food, shelter, or clothing, in some out-building of our properties, either in the stock-house or in the stock-hole."[270] The protections once offered to

[268] Barbados, Apr 1839- Mar 1840, Despatches: Apprentices, CO28/131, The National Archives, London, England, 234.

[269] Jennifer Morgan, *Laboring Women: Reproduction and Gender in New World Slavery,* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004), 151.

[270] Meliora. *Letters on the Labouring Population of Barbados*, (London: Bell and Dadly, 1858), viii.

these vulnerable populations under slavery, including access to food and shelter were no longer legally required upon emancipation, as the system of relief was transferred from the responsibility of planters to that of the colony. And while the legislature permitted a portion of the parochial rates to be expended in poor relief, most parishes did not allocated funds to this purpose, and those that did offered so little that the difference was minimal.[271]

This left the survival of these humans in the hands of their families and community, who so often took care to ensure that they were housed and fed. Laborers' sacrifice for their children could be returned decades later as their children then took care of them in their old age. In a colonial society in which bodies were valued for their contribution to plantation profit, Afro-Barbadian communities' love for one another kept each other alive even when it made individual life harder. Feeding and caring for children, the sick, and the elderly were not necessary for individual survival and often required time, money, food, and resources to be sacrificed. But laboring communities refused to see their loved ones starve in the tropical conditions and took on the cost of keeping these kin and community members alive when they were abandoned by the very system that they had spent their entire lives working for.



Fig.9 "Negro huts, Barbados." Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, Jean Blackwell Hutson Research and Reference Division, The New York Public Library. New York Public Library Digital Collections. Accessed April 19, 2026. https://digitalcollections.nypl.org/items/7876ba90-c61e-012f-5116-58d385a7bc34

[271] Meliora, *Letters Laboring Population,* 17.

Community Care

Women leaned into their communal and kinship bonds to find solutions to their constrained time, including devising a system of communal childcare in post-emancipation society. The estate provided free childcare for laborers during slavery, but this service was among those terminated by planters upon abolition. A planter Thome and Kimball spoke to during apprenticeship described the consequence of this change on his estate: "under the good old system the young children were placed together under the charge of some superannuated women, who were fit for nothing else, and the mothers went into the field to work; now the nursery is broken up, and the mothers spend half of their time 'in taking care of their brats.'"[272] The planter's language illustrates how planters viewed the free children as distracting from their mothers' labor in the field, despite their role in removing the childcare arrangements mothers had previously relied on.

On some plantations, women found new ways to organize childcare as early as the apprenticeship period. In 1837, a Moravian missionary in St. John met an old woman who had been living in a gully since she was freed by her enslaver. She told the missionary that Apprenticed parents had taken her in, in exchange for her watching their children while they were at work.[273] This exchange of shelter for childcare represents one of the creative ways in which laborers leveraged the resources they had to access those that they needed. The older woman's freedom gave her the time to take on childcare, and the parents' access to shelter worked as payment for her time. Families continued to forge systems for communal childcare

[272] Kimball & Thome. *Emancipation in the West Indies: a six months' tour in Antigua, Barbadoes, and Jamaica, in the year 1837,* 267

[273] Morvarian Diary, 2 August 1837. As found in, Melanie Newton, *The Children of Africa in the Colonies,* 146.

into full emancipation. Dr. John Davy who lived on the island from 1845-1848 observed of the laborers that "the care of their children too, is commonly of necessity delegated.; whilst the mothers are in the field they are given in charge to some old woman. Even infants before they are weaned are only partially cared for."[274] Despite the crude tone of this passage, it reveals the adaptations mothers engaged in to ensure that their children were cared for. Even without the support of childcare from the planters, Afro-Barbadian women fostered a community dynamic that served to alleviate the difficult task of balancing labor and childcare. Through creating their own community caregiving system, mothers relieved some of the pressure on raising children to allocate more time towards labor that would advance their children's lives. An impossible decision was mediated through creative use of community connections and the strategy to send children away for education for a better future, despite the emotional strain the separation must have caused for both parent and child.

As illustrated by the newfound systems of childcare, communal strategies extended beyond kin and other close relationships as Afro-Barbadian laborers worked together to combat their positions of exploitation and abuse. One example of this can be seen in the account of an abolitionists' observations of a 'gaol' (jail) scene in 1836. The confined Afro-Barbadian prisoners had been forced to break a certain number of baskets of hard stones daily as punishment. Thirty baskets from each man and twenty-five from each woman were ordered to be broken each day, the punishment for failure was a severe lashing. The observer noted that a pregnant woman who was near her due date, was given the same expectation of twenty-five baskets as the others. Remarkably, the report notes that the stronger Afro-Barbadians in the gaol frequently broke more baskets than their daily quota, and donated such baskets to the weaker

[274] John Davy, *The West Indies, before and since Slave Emancipation,* 95.

prisoners, such as pregnant women, in effort to save them from a whipping.[275] Such an exchange cannot be imagined having taken place through kinship ties exclusively, since the prisoners were most likely not related, or even known to each other prior to their imprisonment. Yet, in a brilliant display of compassion and self-sacrifice, these prisoners expanded their own heavy laborious tasks in order to protect those who could not do so themselves. While this singular anecdote cannot be evidence to a universal phenomenon of laborer communal survival, it does demonstrate that even under the most dehumanizing circumstances, laborers retained humanity for one another. Despite the plantation complex's relentless attempts to insight competition amongst laborers, they were unable to extinguish the compassion and humanity of Afro-Barbadians in its totality.

These short anecdotes are but a small fraction of the acts of love, compassion, and community that laborers most certainly took towards one another, and it can be imagined that such communal ties extended to the plot. These stories above are common in that laborers who had some sort of advantage, used it to the help of a laborer who was in lack. It could therefore be inferred that similar strategies of sharing or exchanging foodstuff took place amongst these groups. Particularly in cases of sickness or starvation, a laboring mother for example, may have turned to those in her community for support in the form of extra provisions or medicinal plants that could help.[276]Exchange and trade were most likely central to the sharing of foodstuffs amongst laborers, who may have offered items they grew or obtained in excess in exchange for another crop or item of value to the other party.

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[275] Joseph Sturge & Thomas Harvey, *The West Indies in 1837; being the journal of a visit to Antigua, Montserrat, Dominica, St. Lucia, Barbadoes, and Jamaica;,* (London: Hamilton, Adams, and co., 1838), 5.

[276] Julia S. Jordan-Zachery and Sonia Peter, *Healing roots, YouTube, 2020,* https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6q9UMudU8EQ

Such cases of food sharing were recorded by James Williams, an apprenticed laborer in Jamaica whose self-told narrative recalls the cruelty and punishment he faced throughout the period of apprenticeship. Williams' narrative notes two moments in which sharing of foodstuffs is directly linked to suffering and compassion. In one instance, James and others were held in a dungeon overnight without "a morsel to eat, and not a so so [*sic*] drop of water."[277] But the prisoners were visited by a friend who "unknowing to massa, put little victuals through a small hole,"[278] thus offering a relief from the depravation being faced as punishment. But even in James' precarious situations of punishment and confinement, he found himself sharing food with others whom he perceived as in need. Not but a week or two after a friend snuck food into his cell, James himself offers food to an old and man who is walking in chains alongside a policeman. He recounts the story: "I see policeman carrying down an old man and a woman handcuffed together; the man was very old, he look more than sixty years old. He was all trembling, and hardly able to walk. I beg the police to stop and let me give them some orange, he do so."[279] In both of these cases, the formerly enslaved acted in solidarity against the cruelty of the colonial system. While James' friend's status is unknown, his relationship to this person is certainly what motivated the sneaky donation, of which the friend risked punishment for if caught. Yet, in the case where James gave some orange to the old man, there is not a personal relationship or connection motivating the exchange. Rather, James acted out of a profound sense of empathy, from which he sacrificed what little valuable resources he had to the help of someone whom he perceived to be worse-off than himself.

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[277] James Williams, *A Narrative of Events since the First of August, 1834, by James Williams, an Apprenticed Labourer in Jamaica,* (London: Printed by J. Rider, 1837), 12.

[278] Williams, 12.

[279] Williams, 20.

These stories demonstrate the retained empathy, compassion, and sense of humanity that was cultivated within laboring communities. There is an undertone of solidarity against a common enemy here, a profound recognition of humanness in contexts in which the plantocracy devalued human life and rendered Afro-Barbadians as disposable. The value placed on food in emancipation society further contextualizes these exchanges as selfless acts of empathy, given the scarcity of food in this period and the subsequent importance of it for both survival and societal progress. Furthermore, these exchanges emphasize the importance of community and communal exchange in a context in which reward and punishment were increasingly tied to individual performance and labor.

Conclusion: Sowing Futures

When Martha made the choice to stay home with her child and miss three days of mandated fieldwork, she defied the plantocracy's reduction of her as an agricultural laborer and committed instead to her job as a mother. Emancipation society did not reward Martha for this choice, instead, she was punished by the estate who fined her for her absence from the field. Martha and the countless women who made the same decision across the West Indies represent the self-sacrifice that was required of women in securing the futures they wished for their children. As formerly enslaved praedials, emancipation had not offered an obtainable path to escape plantation agricultural labor within their lifetime. But this did not stop women from the hope that one day, their children or grandchildren might afford the means to escape the exploitation their generational lines had been subjected to. If women could not achieve this freedom for themselves, they would spend the remainder of their lives fighting for the future of

their children. It is from this desire to liberate their children from agricultural labor, that fueled women's creative use of their rented plots.

Therefore, the relationship laboring women held with the land was a complicated one. It represented the bondage and exploitation of forced and coerced field labor that dominated the lives of these women, and the desire to escape from this land dictated the decisions women made in emancipation. But land and access to it was also one of the only ways women could achieve enough economic mobility to see themselves or their children freed from the estate. This dual relationship with the land is testament to the ways in which colonial power and the legacy of slavery instilled a negative association with agricultural labor, despite the direct benefits women reaped from their immense agricultural expertise and cultural practices expressed in cultivation off of the estate. The located labor system therefore tied these traditional and skillful practices to the legacy of plantation slavery by linking access to land to fieldwork labor. In doing so, women came to see the advantages of their labor and knowledge as measured by their capacity to prevent their children from the same labor.

VI. CONCLUSION

The located labor system's role in the continuation of the socio-economic structures of slavery made land and food the resources of control in the post-emancipation era. The extreme living conditions following emancipation angered formerly enslaved communities as decades passed without structural advancements that would allow them to leave plantation labor. These frustrations came to a head in the 1860s as food shortages and mass starvation left laboring communities no choice but to organize food raids and riots. In response, plantocracy refused to raise wages or lower food prices but loosened their restrictions on emigration. However, for most of the women freed in 1838 who worked tirelessly to see their children escape the plantation, the stiff structures set in place persisted and most of their children lived their lives as field workers as well. Afro-Barbadians spent the remainder of the nineteenth century aiming to dismantle the plantocracy's power, but internal pressure alone was never enough to topple the economic, political, and social power of the sugar empire.

Therefore, the layered history of the garden plot in Barbados should not be removed from the colonial context under which it was created and utilized. While women were able to feed themselves and their families, generate income, and build community from their rented plots, this utilization should not be simplified to agency or choice. The relationship between women and the land was therefore a paradoxical one. The nature of planter control during the emancipation era rendered the rented plot one of the only options for women to benefit financially from their labor. But the underlying goal of mobilizing crops from the plot remained to escape the rural plantation and agricultural labor. Therefore, women's historical relationship to land in Barbados cannot be separated from the colonial, racial, and patriarchal power structures that constrained the possibilities for women despite their legal freedom.

Main Findings and Contributions

This thesis highlights the ways in which Barbados was unique in the unfolding of emancipation in the British Caribbean. As the original, and therefore the furthest along, plantation society at the point of abolition, Barbados was the experimental colony in which systems were tested before being exported to other colonies in the West Indies. The dense population, limited and high-valued land, continued success of the sugar industry post-1838, and excess labor made this island distinct from most other British colonies. While other islands struggled to employ enough people on plantations, Barbados maintained an excessive workforce and Afro-Barbadians remained working on sugar estates. Gender in particular made Barbados unique, as the population maintained a higher number of Afro-Barbadian women than men throughout the first half of the nineteenth century. The distinct land, population, and gender circumstances shaped women's relationship to land and food differently in Barbados than in islands with lower population densities and different gender demographics, which renders this analysis an important contribution to the broader history of Afro-Caribbean post-emanciaption experiences.

The methodological angle of centering land, agriculture, and food as a means to explore the lives of Afro-Barbadian women reflects an interdisciplinary approach to history. This thesis therefore demonstrates how a food studies approach to history can be intertwined with intersectional feminist methodologies to produce a unique lens through which to view lived experiences of women in the past. Because agriculture and land analyses can transcend temporality through their relationship to the natural environment, these topics are well-aligned for the use of critical fabulation. This historical analysis therefore offers a methodological

example of an interdisciplinary approach to history that draws from contemporary agricultural scholarship and fieldwork to bridge archival gaps and ruminate on women's lives.

Similarly to the kitchen garden campaign in Barbados, many contemporary food sovereignty movements speak to historical moments, practices, or systems as a solution to current food system struggles. Some of these movements, particularly Indigenous food sovereignty in the Americas, point to pre-colonial historical agriculture and may therefore avoid some of the pitfalls of the Barbadian campaign. However, as this thesis highlights, applying historical practices to the contemporary moment can reproduce harmful systems if not done with extreme consideration. Food sovereignty campaigns should engage in historical analyses that aim to capture details that may cause unintended consequences if left unattended. Gendered analyses in particular can protect women from absorbing the unintended cost of these projects. "Some literature on agroecology often reproduces the 'myth' of women's 'heroic' capacity to survive, to exercise autonomy, or save the environment, while omitting increases in women's workload and corresponding difficulties in political participation."[280] The thesis therefore illustrates one way in which food sovereignty movements can ground themselves in the acknowledgment of the labor, knowledge, and sacrifice that is often expected from women under these initiatives.

Contemporary Application

The ability for the garden space to function outside of global economic structures is a point of strength when suggesting the reinvigoration of this practice today. As a small island country with a deep colonial past, Barbados is at a structural disadvantage as a participant in the global economy. The island has not broken from the export-based economy on which it was founded, as the tourism sector now accounts for the majority of the country's GDP. This focus

[280] Rita Calvário, & Annette Aurélie Desmarais, "The Feminist Dimensions of Food Sovereignty: insights from La Via Campesina's politics," *The Journal of Peasant Studies* 50(no.2), 2023: 645.

on tourism has led other sectors, including agriculture, to receive less investment and attention. In suggesting that Bajans themselves should grow food to compensate for this lack of national and regional investment in domestic agriculture, the island can increase its internal food production. Therefore, this plan avoids many of the pitfalls of other domestic agricultural investment plans that would shift land, money, and resources out of tourism and towards a sector that cannot survive on the global market.

However, as illustrated by my historical analysis of domestic and household production in emancipation era, the plan rests on a foundation of unpaid labor. While backyard producers might benefit economically from the sale or consumption of their crops, the market has devalued the price of these foods at market in comparison to their production. The time, resources, and labor required to grow this food outweigh the financial benefits from its sale or from saving money on imported foods at the household level. Therefore, the labor behind this production cannot be adequately compensated for under the current global economy, and many Bajans would find it more economically beneficial to dedicate their time towards waged labor. The strategy can then be read as a way to offload the costs of domestic agricultural investment onto Bajans themselves, with the time, labor, and resources of households bearing the cost of increased domestic production.

This is not to say that the proposal will not work; in fact, the movement is already gaining traction across the island as more and more Bajans have begun to restart kitchen gardens. Facebook groups dedicated to sharing information, resources, and outcomes related to home gardening have attracted tens of thousands of members from the island alone. Posts shared in these groups express a wide range of sentiments regarding the benefits of gardening, such as saving money at the store, adding nutrients to the diet, and for moving towards a more secure

food system. The recent intertest in kitchen gardens therefore suggests that some Bajans are willing to labor for the benefit of the island's community, rather than just for individual economic reasons.

While the history of the garden makes an important contribution to the contemporary conversations around food in Barbados, it is merely one piece of the bigger picture. Current discussions have identified barriers such as praedial larceny and insufficient market infrastructure as key challenges affecting the island today.[281] While some scholarship has examined the negative connotations of agricultural labor among younger generations, new food movements on the island may be changing these previously recorded attitudes. Further research is needed to understand current Bajan perspectives on gardening, the role of gender in the contemporary garden space, and key challenges facing Barbadians wanting to start their own kitchen gardens.

Dr. Shantal Munro Knight asked Barbadians "to remember the times when we could open the back door and pull something from the ground."[282]By expanding the history of the garden to the people, systems, and stories behind it, this strategy of looking backwards to move forward is strengthened. This historical analysis therefore contributes to the current food system issues by not only sharing how Barbadians once fed themselves but also by underscoring the power dynamics that created this need in the first place. In illuminating the stories of women whose labor created and continued backyard gardening, Barbadians can foster a cross-temporal

[281] *Food What? Looking for Food Sovereignty in Barbados,* directed by Cloé Fortin, (Barbados: Université de Montrèal, 2023), https://filmfreeway.com/FoodWhatLookingforFoodSovereigntyinBarbados-40minutes

[282] Paula Harper-Grant, "Barbadians Urged to Grow More Food & Support Local Farmers," *Barbados Government Information Services,* March 9, 2026. https://gisbarbados.gov.bb/blog/barbadians-urged-to-grow-more-food-support-local-farmers/

connection with their past in critically carrying traditions forward. It is my hope that this thesis can therefore pay tribute to the women whose work nearly two centuries ago, may now pave the path for the future of Barbados.

APPENDIX: LIST OF PLANTS
Common and Scientific Names

GROUND PROVISIONS
Yam *Dioscorea spp.*
Sweet Potato *Ipomoea batatas*
Eddoe *Colocasia esculenta var. antiquorom*
Potato *Solanum tuberosum*
Cassava *Manihot esculenta*
Arrowroot *Maranta arundinacea*

STAPLE GRAINS
Indian Corn, Maize *Zea mays*
Guinea Corn, Sorghum *Sorghum bicolor*

FRUITS AND VEGETABLES
Pawpaw, Papaya *Carica papaya*
Pepper *Capsicum chinense*
Plantain *Musa paradisiaca*
Banana *Musa spp.*

LEGUMES
Ground Nut, Peanut *Arachis hypogaea*
Pigeon Pea *Cajanus cajan*
Rosary Pea *Abrus precatorius*
Castor Bean *Ricinus communis*

FODDER AND GRASS
(Barbados) Sour Grass, Hurricane Grass, *Megathyrsus maximus*
Guinea Grass *Bothriocholoa pertusa*

MEDICINAL
Aloe *Aloe vera; Aloe barbadensis*
Ginger *Zingiber officinale*

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