



Omohundro Institute
of Early American
History and Culture

Slave Manumissions and Freedmen in Seventeenth-Century Barbados

Author(s): Jerome S. Handler and John T. Pohlmann

Source: *The William and Mary Quarterly*, Third Series, Vol. 41, No. 3 (Jul., 1984), pp. 390-408

Published by: Omohundro Institute of Early American History and Culture

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1922731>

Accessed: 19/06/2009 22:20

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of JSTOR's Terms and Conditions of Use, available at <http://www.jstor.org/page/info/about/policies/terms.jsp>. JSTOR's Terms and Conditions of Use provides, in part, that unless you have obtained prior permission, you may not download an entire issue of a journal or multiple copies of articles, and you may use content in the JSTOR archive only for your personal, non-commercial use.

Please contact the publisher regarding any further use of this work. Publisher contact information may be obtained at <http://www.jstor.org/action/showPublisher?publisherCode=omohundro>.

Each copy of any part of a JSTOR transmission must contain the same copyright notice that appears on the screen or printed page of such transmission.

JSTOR is a not-for-profit organization founded in 1995 to build trusted digital archives for scholarship. We work with the scholarly community to preserve their work and the materials they rely upon, and to build a common research platform that promotes the discovery and use of these resources. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.



Omohundro Institute of Early American History and Culture is collaborating with JSTOR to digitize, preserve and extend access to *The William and Mary Quarterly*.

<http://www.jstor.org>

Slave Manumissions and Freedmen in Seventeenth-Century Barbados

Jerome S. Handler and John T. Pohlmann

THE wealthy sugar-producing island of Barbados, colonized in 1627, by the late seventeenth century possessed a huge slave population as well as a small but growing number of freedmen (free blacks and "mulattoes"). The life and socio-legal position of these freedmen during the late eighteenth century and first few decades of the nineteenth have been discussed previously, but lack of source materials has prevented detailed discussion for the seventeenth century. In particular, very little could be said about manumission, a process that in Barbados, as in England's other New World colonies, largely accounted for the freedman group's origin and early growth.¹

Manumission and the slave's access to legal freedom in the context of the slave society have long interested scholars of New World slavery. The relative ease or difficulty of manumission has been held to reflect a fundamental feature of the slave society and to serve as an indicator to how whites defined the slave's "moral personality." Scholars seem to agree that manumissions were more common in Latin America than in North America (despite continuing disagreements over the relative severity of slave systems in the two areas and their fundamental differences or similarities); however, as Stuart B. Schwartz observed for the New World in general several years ago, "very little is known about the manumission process or how it operated." Schwartz has made an important contribution to understanding manumission in Brazil, and several other recent quanti-

Jerome S. Handler is Professor of Anthropology at Southern Illinois University, Carbondale. John T. Pohlmann, a statistician, is Professor of Guidance and Educational Psychology at the same institution. Acknowledgments: We are indebted to the late Michael J. Chandler, Ellen de la Cruz, Jill Olson, and Lisa Handler for research assistance. The Barbados Department of Archives, through the office of the archivist, Christine Matthews, provided microfilms of some of the wills we analyzed and permitted the remainder to be photocopied. J. H. Hexter, Michael J. Chandler, Susan Lowes, and particularly Patricia M. Spacks offered suggestions on earlier drafts of this article, completed while Handler was a fellow at the National Humanities Center.

¹ Jerome S. Handler, *The Unappropriated People: Freedmen in the Slave Society of Barbados* (Baltimore, 1974), and "Joseph Rachell and Rachael Pringle-Polgreen: Petty Entrepreneurs," in David G. Sweet and Gary B. Nash, eds., *Struggle and Survival in Colonial America* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1981), 376-391.

tatively oriented studies treat Brazil and other Latin American areas,² but his observation is still relevant to England's seventeenth-century Caribbean and continental colonies. Although the scholarly literature provides some information on manumission in these colonies, this information largely relates to the eighteenth and especially the nineteenth centuries. For the earliest periods of colonial development there are no systematic studies of manumission, and none based on quantitative analysis.

This article focuses on the manumission process and the characteristics of manumitted slaves from 1650 to 1700. Throughout the period Barbados was a quintessential plantation-slave society, and by the mid-1670s, when the island was, according to Richard S. Dunn, "the richest and most populous colony in English America," it had at least 32,800 slaves, a number far exceeding that of any other English colony. Barbados's slaves numbered almost double the combined total of approximately 17,950 blacks in England's five other Caribbean colonies and close to six times the total of the approximately 5,750 blacks in all the mainland colonies combined.³

Our discussion treats various manumission devices but focuses on eighty wills that manumitted 123 slaves; we also discuss eight deeds with ten manumissions. Although small, the sample affords the largest single body of data available on slave manumissions for any seventeenth-century English colony. The closest comparable sample in size and period consists of eighty-five South Carolina manumission documents, involving 124 slaves, for the period 1730-1776; about one-half postdate 1763.⁴

The Barbadian data help establish a base line for gauging temporal changes in the island's manumission procedures. Moreover, they indicate important social and demographic characteristics of slaves manumitted during the early development of a major New World slave society; they

² Schwartz, "The Manumission of Slaves in Colonial Brazil: Bahia, 1684-1745," *Hispanic American Historical Review*, LIV (1974), 603-635; Lyman L. Johnson, "Manumission in Colonial Buenos Aires, 1776-1810," *ibid.*, LIX (1979), 258-279 (including various studies Johnson cites).

³ Dunn, *Sugar and Slaves: The Rise of the Planter Class in the English West Indies, 1624-1713* (Chapel Hill, N.C., 1972), 84. The Barbados figure represents the mean of 1673 and 1675 figures; both are probably low (Peter Colleton to Council for Trade and Plantations, May 28, 1673, in W. Noel Sainsbury *et al.*, eds., *Calendar of State Papers, Colonial Series, America and West Indies, 1669-1674* [London, 1860-], 495, hereafter cited as *Cal. State Papers*; Jonathan Atkins, "An Account of His Majesty's Island of Barbadoes," Feb. 1676, *ibid.*, 1675-1676, 348-349). Caribbean and mainland figures derive from Dunn, *Sugar and Slaves*, 127, 155, and United States. Bureau of the Census, *Historical Statistics of the United States, Colonial Times to 1970* (Washington, D.C., 1976), 1152. The 1675 mainland figure is the mean between the 1670 and 1680 estimates.

⁴ John Duncan, "Servitude and Slavery in Colonial South Carolina, 1670-1776" (Ph.D. diss., Emory University, 1972), 394-398. In briefly analyzing these documents, Duncan fails to indicate sampling criteria and provides no basis for judging the sample's representativeness.

permit systematic testing of various interpretations of manumission in England's Caribbean slave colonies during their formative years; and they suggest some demographic features of an early freedman population.

Modern scholarship has generated relatively little information on freedmen in England's New World colonies in the seventeenth century, with the major exception of T. H. Breen and Stephen Innes's recent work.⁵ The primary emphasis in studies of the British West Indies is the nineteenth century and, to a much lesser degree, the late eighteenth.

By the 1650s or 1660s, small numbers of freedmen lived in Virginia, Maryland, New England, New York, and Bermuda. By the end of the century, freedmen also probably lived in Pennsylvania, North and South Carolina, New Jersey, and Delaware. Scanty evidence indicates the early presence of freedmen in England's Caribbean colonies; exclusive of maroon (runaway slave) communities, they lived in Jamaica and Antigua (and probably other Leeward islands) during the second half of the seventeenth century.⁶

Although it is uncertain when freedmen originated in Barbados, scattered and fragmentary information suggests that in the colony's first fifteen or so years not all nonfree blacks were necessarily enslaved for life. Some may have had positions comparable to indentured servants. Secondary sources report that in the continental colonies during the same period

⁵ Breen and Innes, "Myne Owne Ground": *Race and Freedom on Virginia's Eastern Shore, 1640-1676* (New York, 1980).

⁶ For example, John Russell, *The Free Negro in Virginia, 1619-1865* (Baltimore, 1913), 10-49; Warren M. Billings, "The Cases of Fernando and Elizabeth Key: A Note on the Status of Blacks in Seventeenth-Century Virginia," *William and Mary Quarterly*, 3d Ser., XXX (1973), 467-474; Breen and Innes, "Myne Owne Ground," *passim*; Lorenzo Johnston Greene, *The Negro in Colonial New England, 1620-1776* (New York, 1942), 290-291; Robert C. Twombly and Robert H. Moore, "Black Puritan: The Negro in Seventeenth-Century Massachusetts," *WMQ*, 3d Ser., XXIV (1967), 235-236; James M. Wright, *The Free Negro in Maryland, 1634-1860* (New York, 1921), 21-23, 31; Ross M. Kimmel, "Free Blacks in Seventeenth-Century Maryland," *Maryland Historical Magazine*, LXXI (1976), 23; Edgar J. McManus, *A History of Negro Slavery in New York* (Syracuse, N.Y., 1966), 12, 61, 141-142; Winthrop D. Jordan, *White over Black: American Attitudes toward the Negro, 1550-1812* (Chapel Hill, N.C., 1968), 88-89, 93; Edward Raymond Turner, *The Negro in Pennsylvania: Slavery, Servitude, Freedom, 1639-1861* (Washington, D.C., 1911), 54-55, 109; John Hope Franklin, *The Free Negro in North Carolina, 1790-1860* (Chapel Hill, N.C., 1943), 9; Peter H. Wood, *Black Majority: Negroes in Colonial South Carolina from 1670 through the Stono Rebellion* (New York, 1974), 98, 99, 100, 102-103, 157-159; Simeon F. Moss, "The Persistence of Slavery and Involuntary Servitude in a Free State [New Jersey], 1685-1866," *Journal of Negro History*, XXXV (1950), 299, 307; John A. Munroe, "The Negro in Delaware," *South Atlantic Quarterly*, LVI (1957), 428; Dunn, *Sugar and Slaves*, 174-175, 228n, 244-245, 254-255; and David Barry Gaspar, "Runaways in Seventeenth-Century Antigua, West Indies," *Boletín de Estudios Latinoamericanos y del Caribe*, XXVI (1979), 9.

blacks became freedmen after serving fixed terms,⁷ and there are indications that *some* of Barbados's earliest freedmen may have become free by a similar process. By the later seventeenth century, a few Barbados freedmen may have been freeborn,⁸ but throughout the century, as in the mainland colonies, the majority had been manumitted from slavery.

Two 1652 wills document the earliest known manumissions of black slaves in Barbados.⁹ Manumission by wills almost certainly occurred earlier, however, and piecemeal evidence (including two surveyor depositions alluding to freedman landholders) suggests the presence of freedmen by the early 1640s and certainly in the 1650s.¹⁰

Although the freedman population increased during the seventeenth century, it never became more than a small fraction of either the nonwhite or the free population. The smallness of the group can be inferred from the sparsity of references to freedmen in a wide variety of primary sources including baptismal, burial, and marriage records, as well as in detailed contemporary descriptions of Barbados's ethnic and racial groups; moreover, no freedmen are mentioned in seventeenth-century population statistics. In this respect Barbados resembled England's other New World colonies: for none of these colonies are figures available on the total number of freedmen for any year in the seventeenth century, but all investigators agree that their numbers were very small. The minute number of Barbados's freedmen is evident in the island's earliest population statistics that include freedmen. In 1748, the first year for which figures are available, only 107 freedmen were reported—a little less than

⁷ For example, Greene, *Negro in Colonial New England*, 290-291; Twombly and Moore, "Black Puritan," *WMQ*, 3d Ser., XXIV (1967), 225n and *passim*; Edmund S. Morgan, *American Slavery, American Freedom: The Ordeal of Colonial Virginia* (New York, 1975), 154-155; Paul C. Palmer, "Servant into Slave: The Evolution of the Legal Status of the Negro Laborer in Colonial Virginia," *S. Atlantic Q.*, LXV (1966), 358, 363; and Kimmel, "Free Blacks in Seventeenth-Century Maryland," *Md. Hist. Mag.*, LXXI (1976), 19-25.

⁸ The earliest explicit reference, however, is in the St. Michael parish register, where the Dec. 1700 baptism of James, "a free born Negro man," is recorded (RL 1/1, Barbados Department of Archives, St. Michael, Barbados).

⁹ RB 6/11, 510-511, 532, Barbados Dept. Archs. Carl and Roberta Bridenbaugh report a manumission in Peter Hancock's will, which they date at 1639; however, the year is mistaken (*No Peace Beyond the Line: The English in the Caribbean, 1624-1690* [New York, 1972], 120-121). In the source the Bridenbaughs employed, the year is given as 1679, and the will itself is also dated 1679 (Davis Collection, Box 8, Item 11, Royal Commonwealth Society, London; RB 6/14, 28, Barbados Dept. Archs.).

¹⁰ RB 3/1, 40, 46, Barbados Dept. Archs.; Jerome S. Handler, "The Amerindian Slave Population of Barbados in the Seventeenth and Early Eighteenth Centuries," *Caribbean Studies*, VIII (1969), 53-54; Barbados Council, Minutes, Mar. 20, 1655, Oct. 5, 1658, Nov. 2, 1658, in *Minutes of the Barbados Council* (February 1654-December 1658), 2 vols., typescript, Public Record Office, hereafter cited as Barbados Council, Minutes; John Jennings, ed., *Acts and Statutes of the Island of Barbados . . .* (London, 1654), 20-21.

0.2 percent of Barbados's population; in 1768, there were 448 (0.5 percent); by 1773, 534 (0.6 percent), and in 1786, 838 (1.1 percent).¹¹ These figures indicate that the freedman group developed very slowly over a long period; this slow growth is reflected in the rarity of slave manumissions in the seventeenth century.

In seventeenth-century Barbados, as in England's other colonies, the three means of manumission were through legislative (and court) action, deed conveyances, and wills and testaments. Other means were also employed in later times,¹² but in the seventeenth century there were no other legally binding devices. Although some slaves may have believed themselves free by the verbal assurances of owners, without a document such informal procedures could not have put a manumission into effect.

Not until 1692 did the Barbados legislature provide a way to freedom apart from an owner's voluntary action. A statute of that year made possible the manumission of slaves who informed on fellow slaves planning to "commit or abet any insurrection or rebellion," but this law seems not to have been invoked until 1817, after the first slave uprising in the island's history.¹³ Only this law specified conditions under which freedom could be granted. In all other cases, an owner decided whether and when a slave should be manumitted. No law or legal statement formally granted owners permission to free slaves or defined circumstances under which individual masters could manumit. The right to manumit, established in custom and never requiring specific legal definition, derived from the legal right of a property holder to alienate, dispose of, or relinquish title to property in general. This right could be restricted by legislation, but not until fees were established in 1739 did the Barbados legislature try to curtail manumission.¹⁴

In Barbados, as in other English colonies, manumission could be validated (or denied) through petition to a legislative body (usually the Council) or litigation in the courts, rights blacks possessed in some colonies through most of the seventeenth century, in other colonies through the entire century. Such appeals in Barbados stemmed from

¹¹ Handler, *Unappropriated People*, 18-19.

¹² Noting "a number of different ways by which a black person might gain freedom" on Virginia's Eastern Shore from 1640 to 1676, Breen and Innes emphasize "manumission and self-purchase" as "the most common," contrasting one device with the other. Their data, however, show that self-purchase was a means of achieving a deed manumission. The master had to relinquish his claim to the slave, who received a document, a form of deed, in which the owner discharged him and granted his freedom ("*Myne Owne Ground*," 72-77). We have no evidence of self-purchase in 17th-century Barbados, although it occurred in later times; it was recognized in custom but never in law and was always related to deed manumissions (Handler, *Unappropriated People*, 34-37).

¹³ Richard Hall, *Acts, Passed in the Island of Barbados* (London, 1764), 129-130. Also, Jerome S. Handler, "Slave Revolts and Conspiracies in Seventeenth-Century Barbados," *Nieuwe West-Indische Gids*, LVI (1982), 5-42.

¹⁴ Handler, *Unappropriated People*, 34, 39-40, 125-126.

contested cases wherein a will or deed had previously freed the slave. However, very few such cases are known from the seventeenth century and the first few years of the eighteenth. In general, proving or validating free status was a serious problem for freedmen throughout the slavery period, the process frequently entailing considerable difficulty, personal frustration, and anguish, as well as, after 1721, legal impediments. Moreover, for most of the period of slavery Barbados lacked an effective system for registering freedmen and manumissions as well as systematic procedures for adjudicating contested manumission cases.¹⁵

The Barbados Department of Archives holds bound volumes of deed books dating from 1640 to 1700 and containing thousands of items: conventional land conveyances, depositions to authenticate documents, bills of lading, letters of exchange, decisions on court litigations, and, occasionally, slave manumissions. It being impractical to examine each of these many items, a sampling procedure was employed that relied on recopied deed books and their indexes.

Original seventeenth-century deeds (virtually nonexistent in the Barbados archives today) were transcribed by contemporaries and recorded in deed record books. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries the Barbados Registration Office recopied the seventeenth-century deed books from time to time as individual volumes became excessively fragile. Since not all original record book volumes were recopied, the recopied deed books do not include all the deeds recorded in Barbados in the last half of the seventeenth century. To estimate the number of recopied deeds, the deed indexes were consulted. Each index volume lists about 40 deeds per page, which, when multiplied by the total number of pages in the volumes, yields approximately 10,300 recopied deeds. Although many thousand more deeds were recorded during the last half of the century (the loss of many early deed record books and the frailty of the surviving ones without indexes making it extremely difficult to estimate the total number recorded), a sampling of the estimated 10,300 yielded only eight manumission deeds (involving ten slaves), and it can be reasonably concluded that the recopied deed books do not contain many more: clearly, deed manumission was very rare.¹⁶

¹⁵ Barbados Council, Minutes, Mar. 20, 1655, Oct. 5, Nov. 2, 1658; Jan. 23, 1701, *Cal. State Papers, 1701*, 49; Oct. 27, 1702, *ibid.*, 1702, 692; June 9, Oct. 26, 1703, *ibid.*, 1702-1703, 491, 771; Hilary M. Beckles, "White Labour in Black Slave Plantation Society and Economy: A Case Study of Indentured Labour in Seventeenth-Century Barbados" (Ph.D. diss., University of Hull, 1980), 207; Handler, *Unappropriated People*, 59-65.

¹⁶ The recopied deed books were sampled by using their indexes as a guide to the deed contents. The indexes are arranged alphabetically (and chronologically) by the *grantor's* last name; next to it is the *grantee's* name and occasionally the type of document, for example, "certificate," "deposition," "manumission." The *grantee* columns were systematically searched for any mention or suggestion of manumission. On the chance that the indexes did not specify all manumissions, all index volumes up to the letter "J" were searched for entries that lacked a grantee's name,

The eight manumission deeds represent three types.¹⁷ In Type I (three deeds, three different slaves), executors followed the directives of testators whose wills had specified manumissions. We do not know why a deed was needed to accompany a will manumission, but this procedure seems to have been unusual. A deed might have provided an extra safeguard for a slave if, for example, other heirs or previous owners contested his freedom. As is discussed below, wills sometimes directed that the slave receive a document, in addition to the manumission, to authenticate his or her new status. Type II deeds (two deeds, two slaves) granted freedom, but only after the owner's death. This type was comparable, if not identical, to a will manumission; it is not known why the latter device was not chosen. In Type III (three deeds, five slaves), the slave was to receive unconditional freedom as soon as the deed was recorded.

Excluding the three executor-manumitted slaves (Type I), who are included in our discussion of wills, at least five manumittedes were black (the phenotype of the other two is unknown); there were five adults and two children, and five females and two males. All the adults appear to have been domestic servants. While the small number of deed manumissions precludes a statistical comparison with the sample manumitted by will, two similarities exist: both modes of manumission favored domestic servants and adult females.

Original manuscript wills dating from Barbados's earliest years have long since disappeared, but in the late nineteenth century the island's Registration Office began recopying the early wills record books. Today, the Department of Archives contains manuscript copies of several thousand original wills recorded and proved on the island from 1639 to 1700. Only a few antedate 1650 (and none of these contain manumissions), but there are copies of virtually all known wills proved in Barbados between 1650 and 1690, as well as most of those recorded from 1691 to 1700—a total of 3,777 for the period 1650-1700.

To search such a large number of wills for evidence of slave manumissions would have been unfeasible until the recent publication of two volumes of will abstracts. Intended for genealogical researchers, these abstracts include all recopied wills from 1639 to 1700 and are invaluable timesaving guides to the contents of the recopied wills; most important for our purposes, they contain the names of manumitted slaves as well as archival references to the recopied will books.¹⁸

contained *only* a grantee's *first* name (the vast majority of slaves lacked surnames), or provided any indication of an unusual deed. This method yielded 51 deeds; none contained manumissions. This spot checking and sampling suggests that the deed indexes are fairly accurate guides to the manumissions contained in the recopied deed books.

¹⁷ RB 3/16, 177; RB 3/17, 363, 410, 412; RB 3/20, 559; RB 3/21, 257-258; RB 7/2, 211; RB 7/4, 81, Barbados Dept. Archs.

¹⁸ Joanne McCree Sanders, ed., *Barbados Records: Wills and Administrations, Volume I: 1639-1680* (Marceline, Mo., 1979), and *Volume II: 1681-1700* (Houston,

TABLE I
WILLS AND SLAVE MANUMISSIONS IN BARBADOS, 1650-1700

<i>Decade</i>	<i>No. Wills (Testators)</i>	<i>No. Slaves Manumitted</i>	<i>No. Testators Who Manumitted</i>
1650-1659	529	13	9
1660-1669	528	23	13
1670-1679	757	8	7
1680-1689	1,083	51	33
1690-1700	880	28	18
Totals	3,777	123	80

Source: Sanders, ed., *Barbados Records*, I, II.

In order to locate manumission wills, two research assistants systematically read each abstract volume. The total number of 3,777 wills was thereby ascertained, and 80 containing the 123 manumissions were isolated (see Table I).¹⁹ Working from photocopies or microfilms of these wills, we recorded the year each will was proved, and the testator's name, sex, occupation (if occupation was not specified, it could sometimes be inferred; for example, if a testator bequeathed lands and slaves and cattle, we coded "planter"), whether the spouse was alive or any indication that the testator had not been married. We also attempted to ascertain the total number of slaves each testator owned (in many cases this was impossible; in other cases a minimum number could definitely be established), and we recorded the total number each manumitted.

We recorded the manumitted slaves' names (although sometimes these names are obviously inaccurate representations), their sex, age group, racial category or phenotype, and occupation. Wills rarely provide additional information on a given slave, and many do not specify all the above characteristics. We could not ascertain sex in twelve cases; we could not

Tex., 1980). There are, however, occasional transcription errors and name omissions, and by chance we found two manumission wills not noted in the abstracts (P. Hancock and R. Hotton [or Hutton]: *ibid.*, I, 162, 187-188; RB 6/14, 28, 82, Barbados Dept. Archs.), and there may be more. For background on wills held in the archives see Michael Chandler, "Preface," in Sanders, ed., *Barbados Records*, I.

¹⁹ RB 6/1, 133-134; 6/8, 98-100, 127-128, 457-462, 566-570; 6/9, 379; 6/10, 87, 124-125, 144, 198-200, 353-354, 385-386, 427-429, 435-436, 448-449, 522-523; 6/11, 64-65, 99-101, 139-141, 208-216, 256-258, 355-358, 400-404, 510, 532; 6/12, 21-22, 145-147, 149-151, 192-197, 260-263, 415-416, 475-477, 542-543; 6/13, 64-65, 144-145, 157-158, 467-468, 546-547; 6/14, 28, 82, 283-285, 289-291, 333-335, 345-347, 385; 6/15, 63, 95, 109, 136-138, 171-172, 247, 253-254, 383-384, 506-508, 522-524; 6/16, 284-286; 6/30, 12; 6/40, 162-167, 204-205, 260-268, 308-315, 318-320, 347-349, 359-364, 369-371, 406-407, 498-500; 6/41, 15-17, 186-188, 380-382, 465-469; 6/42, 1-3, 23-25; 6/43, 76-78, 118-119, 133-137, Barbados Dept. Archs.

TABLE II
 DEMOGRAPHIC CHARACTERISTICS OF MANUMITTED SLAVES,
 BY SEX, AGE GROUP, AND PHENOTYPE*

	<i>Males</i> (N = 61, 55.0%)			<i>Females</i> (N = 50, 45.0%)			<i>Unknown Sex</i> (N = 12)		
	<i>Un- known</i>			<i>Un- known</i>			<i>Un- known</i>		
	<i>Blk.</i>	<i>Mul.</i>	<i>Pheno.</i>	<i>Blk.</i>	<i>Mul.</i>	<i>Pheno.</i>	<i>Blk.</i>	<i>Mul.</i>	<i>Pheno.</i>
Young Child (N = 5, 5.6%)	0	0	2	2	0	0	0	1	0
Boy, Girl (N = 37, 41.1%)	17	2	6	4	1	6	0	1	0
Adult (N = 48, 53.3%)	17	0	2	25	2	2	0	0	0
Unknown Age (N = 33)	15	0	0	6	0	2	10	0	0
Totals by Phenotype: Black (N = 96, 93.2%); Mulatto (N = 7, 6.8%)									

* Percentages for demographic characteristics are based on only those individuals for whom the wills provide information and do not include our assumed characteristics, that is, probable cases.

determine age grouping for thirty-three of the manumittedes; and the wills did not give phenotype for twenty of the slaves (see Table II). We could fill some gaps by inference: for example, we recorded "male" if the slave had a male name such as Jack, and "domestic servant" if the testator indicated the performance of a particular household task. We noted whether a slave received a bequest (and the nature of this bequest), the conditions surrounding manumission, and any exceptional features of a will. We also attempted to infer relationships between manumitters and manumittedes (the wills never explicitly give such information), and whether, if manumitted by the same testator as part of a group, the slave was related to other members of that group where no relationship was mentioned.

Information recorded on the data sheets was then coded for statistical analysis. The first inferential analysis, a test for associations among variables coded from the wills, was intended to uncover relationships that we had neither anticipated nor intended to pursue. The analysis then proceeded by tabulating the numbers and percentages of slaves, testators, and wills that possessed certain characteristics. A significance level of .05 percent was used for all inferential analyses.

Most of the will sample testators were males (N=65, 81.3 percent). All the females (N=15, 18.8 percent) were widows, the majority being landowners and probably the widows of planters. Two-thirds of the whole

sample (N=53, 66.2 percent), including widows with plantations or other lands, were definitely or most probably planters; a smaller group (N=10, 12.5 percent) consisted of merchants, doctors, and skilled tradesmen. No occupation could be identified for 21.2 percent of the testators, including some widows. The large representation of planters, or of agricultural landowners, was expected, since such persons possessed most of Barbados's slaves.

The testator group manumitted very selectively. Seventeen wills provide a reasonably clear indication of the total number of slaves owned by individual testators; the average number was 6.7, while the average number of slaves these owners manumitted was 1.5. Sixty-three additional wills permit establishing the *minimum* number of slaves owned, particularly by planters. For example, one testator owned *at least* twelve slaves, another had *at least* sixteen, and a third owned *at least* thirty-two. The average number of slaves manumitted by testators who owned *at least* six slaves was two. Available figures thus indicate that as a group manumitters freed only a small fraction of their slaves, and the manumitter who freed all of his or her slaves was by far the exception; the handful of such cases comprises slaveowners who evidently owned no more than one or two slaves.

The rarity of manumission as a societal phenomenon emerges still more dramatically when the manumission wills are compared with all wills proved in Barbados, and the number of manumitted slaves is examined in relation to the island's total slave population. Perhaps the most vivid indicator is the very small number of testators who manumitted. From 1650 to 1700, only 80 of the 3,777 testators (2.1 percent) freed slaves (Table I). (Although we cannot determine how many of the nonmanumitting testators were slaveowners, Barbadian socioeconomic patterns during this period suggest that the great majority of them were.) Furthermore, these 80 manumitted only 123 slaves—1.5 slaves per owner and an average of 2.4 slaves per year during the fifty-one years of the sample.²⁰

Even if all these slaves actually became free, they represented but a minute portion of Barbados's slave population. Figures on the total number of slaves are lacking for most years, but authoritative estimates or counts exist for 1673, 1675, 1679/80, and 1684.²¹ Although these figures

²⁰ A very slight but statistically significant increase in the manumission rate occurs after 1680 (even considering that gaps exist in the recopied will books for 1691 and 1696-1699 because of the decayed state of the originals). After 1680 there are 51 wills (2.6%) with manumissions out of a total of 1,963; before 1680, 29 wills (1.6%) specified manumission out of a total of 1,814 (see Table I). Despite the small increase in will manumissions over time, the predominant fact remains that they were rare.

²¹ Colleton to Council for Trade and Plantations, May 28, 1673, *Cal. State Papers, 1669-1674*, 495; Atkins, "Account of His Majesty's Island," *ibid.*, 348-349; "Account of Barbados and the Government Thereof," 1683/4, Sloane MSS 2441, British Library; "Census of Barbados, 1679," C.O. 1/44, no. 47, P.R.O.

are probably low, used as a sample of the twelve-year period, 1673 to 1684, they yield 37,750 as the approximate annual average number of slaves island-wide. During these twelve years, 22 slaves were manumitted by will, an average of 1.8 per year, or a minuscule 0.005 percent of the annual total slave population. It cannot be too strongly emphasized that during the seventeenth century, as indeed throughout the whole period of slavery, the vast majority of Barbadian slaves had virtually no hope of gaining freedom through their owners' voluntary acts.

The eighty wills in the seventeenth century sample provide the clearest evidence that will manumission, though rare, was still more common than deed manumission. Because wills were the seventeenth century's major manumission device, they are excellent sources of data on the characteristics of *all* manumitted slaves.

Sex distribution was approximately equal, males constituting 55 percent of the sample, and did not significantly differ from that of the slave population at large: during the last half of the seventeenth century, a few available island-wide statistics indicate that 49 percent of slaves were male.²² Adults composed 53.3 percent of the sample. No data are available to permit comparison to the overall slave population. When age and sex are correlated, more boys were manumitted than girls, and more women than men.²³

Wills (like other seventeenth-century sources) consistently distinguished between "mulattoes" and "Negroes," the two major white-defined racial groups among nonwhites. Over 90 percent of the sample was "Negro"; only 6.8 percent was "mulatto." While only seven "mulattoes" were manumitted, it is important to stress that this number is considerably greater than would be expected based on the percentage of "mulattoes" in Barbados during this period.

The growth of a "mulatto" population probably started very early, but until 1684 no figures exist for it. In that year, in what appears to be the *only* figure on the total number of "mulattoes" for *any* seventeenth-century English colony, a contemporary, officially prepared description of Barbados reported 326 "mulattoe" slaves; they constituted only 0.7 percent of the 46,602 island-wide *slave* population.²⁴ Though these numbers may not be entirely accurate (and there were probably some

²² Population figures are cited in Jerome S. Handler and Frederick W. Lange, *Plantation Slavery in Barbados: An Archaeological and Historical Investigation* (Cambridge, Mass., 1978), 36.

²³ When the wills indicate age, only age groups (never absolute ages) are specified. The two adult categories ("man" and "woman") presumably refer to individuals over 16, perhaps 20, following conventional usage in Barbados; for "boys" and "girls" the minimum age was probably about two, perhaps somewhat older. The wills also occasionally use the term "child," some other word denoting a small or newly born infant (for example, "pequaniny"), or otherwise make clear that the individual was younger than either a "boy" or "girl."

²⁴ "Account of Barbados and the Government Thereof," Sloane MSS 2441.

“mulatto” freedmen at this time as well), there is no reason to suspect that they significantly distort the mid-1680s demographic profile. Moreover, the number and percentage of “mulattoes” were probably less in earlier periods and probably not much higher in the final decade of the seventeenth century.

Thus the manumission data indicate that “mulattoes” were freed at a higher rate than their relative numbers in the slave population at large. This finding suggests that the manumission pattern tending to favor “mulattoes,” which became more pronounced in later times, started during the last half of the seventeenth century. By the end of slavery in 1832-1834, 63 percent of a sample of 427 manumitted slaves were “mulattoes,” although in 1832 “mulattoes” constituted only 14.0 percent of the total slave population.²⁵

The wills explicitly name occupations for only 13.6 percent of the slaves; all are identified as domestic servants or “house Negroes.” Another 7.9 percent were small children with no assumed or given occupations. For the other 78.4 percent, however, phraseology in the wills clearly indicates that they were also domestic servants—for example, a man “which used to run along with me,” or a boy “who in my lifetime did run with me.” The meaning of such expressions is suggested by late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century observers. One, for example, remarked on slaves attending carriages as footmen, running or walking alongside at the pace of the horses to bridle them when they stopped; another reported “a custom very prevalent here. . . . The Negro slaves that accompanied us [on a country ride] took hold of our horses’ tails to keep up with us.”²⁶ In addition to footmen (who probably also performed other tasks for their masters), other personal servants or domestics are inferable from a number of wills: for example, Black Sue was to be freed seven years after her owner’s death, but only if during that time she “faithfully serve and justly obey” his wife, and before manumission Joane was to “serve my wife or either [of] my daughters living with her, in England, Barbados, or elsewhere . . . if they desire it.”

With only two exceptions, the wills omit the birthplace of the manumitted. About 90 percent, if not more, had English or English-sounding names, but names are unreliable indicators of place of birth—whether African or New World—because whites commonly referred to slaves by English names. The two exceptions, which also provide good examples of this pattern, are Frost and Sara, both identified as females from Madagascar.

Most of the 123 slaves received only manumission, but 43 (35 percent)

²⁵ Handler, *Unappropriated People*, 51. The 1832 figure was kindly furnished by Barry Higman, who calculated it from the slave registry returns.

²⁶ For reasons of space, references to individual wills, quoted or otherwise mentioned, are omitted. George Pinckard, *Notes on the West Indies* . . . (London, 1806) I, 281-282; John A. Waller, *A Voyage in the West Indies* . . . (London, 1820), 18.

TABLE III
BEQUEST TYPES, BY FREQUENCY OF RECIPIENTS AND DONORS*

<i>Bequest</i>	<i>No. Slave Recipients</i>	<i>No. Testator Donors</i>
Money or Sugar	15	12
24-40 shillings sterling	7	
5-10 £ sterling	3	
20-40 £ sterling	2	
1,000-2,000 lbs. sugar	3	
Land	15	7
60 square feet	1	
½-1 acre	7	
10-15 acres	6	
plantation (unspecified acreage)	1	
Clothing	11	7
Document	6	6
Small material goods	4	4
House	4	3
Schooling	3	3
Apprenticeship	2	2
Slave	1	1
Totals	61	45

* Because 17 slaves received more than one bequest, the number of slave recipients totals more than the 43 slaves who received bequests; 13 testators gave more than one bequest.

were given an additional bequest (see Table III). No significant relationship was found between the receipt of a bequest and the recipient's sex, age group, or phenotype. Given by 28 (35 percent) of the testators, bequests included money or sugar (the latter often used in lieu of currency), land, clothing, small material goods such as an iron pot, wooden box, or hammock, and the house in which the slave was living (usually only for the slave's lifetime). In one case, Mary Ann Judi, an adult, received "one Negro girl called Mary Ann for her own proper slave"; the woman may have been the girl's mother.

Monetary bequests were relatively common, with a rather wide range of amounts. In most cases, monetary (and sugar) bequests were to be made in one sum when the slave was freed; twice they were given as annuities over a specified number of years. Money and sugar bequests to slaves sometimes favorably compared with those received by whites in the same wills. For example, Elizabeth Paynter named thirty-eight white legatees. Most received jewelry, clothing, silver utensils, or small amounts of money; others were given sugar in amounts ranging from 100 to 2,000 pounds. One of Paynter's three manumittedes received 1,000 pounds of sugar; this exceeded the amount given several of the white heirs. Samuel Thompson named seven white legatees—cousins, godchildren, and friends—bequeathing from £20 to £300 sterling. However, Thompson's "Negro slave Jack," the only slave manumitted, also received £30; this was more than

Thompson left to two of his friends. Jack was also left "a piece of land" to use during his lifetime.

Land, another common bequest, ranged from a small housespot to a plantation (with "all the edifices and buildings, profits and privileges thereto belonging"), to be inherited after the testator's wife died. The third major bequest was clothing, ranging, in the six cases where the quantity was specified, from one to four "suites."

Nine testators made other kinds of bequests reflecting concern for their manumittedes' future well-being. A few executors were directed to provide for schooling or apprenticeship to a trade, or to give a document attesting the manumission. For example, in the main text of his will Gideon Golding, a small planter with twelve slaves, freed a woman and her son Baddue, a black boy "that used to run with me." But Golding added a codicil specifying Baddue's manumission "immediately after my death"; so that Baddue "may claim his right," he was to be given a copy of the codicil. And when Thomas Bressie, a medical doctor, manumitted "my Negro boy Tom," he directed his executors to give Tom a written "indenture to the purpose that he may not be cheated [of his manumission] if they should die" before Tom was freed. These stipulations reflect concern with the problem that plagued manumitted slaves throughout the era of slavery: validating or proving their free status.

Important as bequests may have been to their impoverished and socially vulnerable recipients, their general significance in the manumission process should not be overemphasized: 64 percent of the slaves received no bequests, and 65 percent of the manumitters left none. Moreover, we cannot ascertain how many executors actually carried out their instructions with respect to slave heirs, nor do we know whether white heirs successfully contested certain bequests or, indeed, the manumissions themselves. (Judging from eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century evidence and from indications in seventeenth-century sources when non-whites litigated for their freedom, whites could and did use various devices to frustrate manumission.) This problem may have been particularly acute for slaves whose manumissions were delayed because conditions in the wills specified freedom only after a significant time period had elapsed.

For 55 slaves (44.7 percent) the wills imply or clearly state that manumissions should take place either immediately after the testator's death or within less than a year. In these cases, involving 35 testators (43.8 percent), the owners clearly did not intend that their slaves continue in bondage for an appreciable time. In the majority of cases, however, involving 65 slaves (52.8 percent) and 43 testators (53.8 percent), conditions in the wills could greatly extend the time before manumission.²⁷

²⁷ In addition, three slaves (of three different owners) were to be manumitted only if certain conditions were first met: for instance, Joane was bequeathed to a testator's wife or any of his daughters; only if none of them wanted Joane as a servant was she to be freed.

TABLE IV
CONDITIONS OF MANUMISSION

<i>Condition</i>	<i>No. Slaves</i>	<i>No. Testators</i>
One or more years after testator's death	32	23
1-5 years	16	12
6-10 years	10	8
21-30 years	6	3
After death of testator's spouse or kinsman	16	11
When slave reaches specified age	7	7
21-25 years	5	5
36 years	1	1
50 years	1	1
After expiration of lease	5	2
Apprenticeship first, then freedom	4	4
Other	2	2
Totals	66	49

The wills reveal several types of conditions (see Table IV). The most common specified freedom when a period of time, minimally one year, had elapsed after the testator's death; the period ranged up to thirty years with a median of 5.5 years. Wills of this type usually specified that the slave should serve an heir until the period had expired. In the second most common condition the slave was bequeathed to (and expected to serve) a close relative, almost invariably the testator's wife: freedom was to be gained when the heir died or, occasionally, the spouse remarried, the time being thus left indeterminate. A third condition involved manumission when the slave attained a specified age, typically between twenty-one and twenty-five; this condition pertained mainly to small children. Another condition derived from the fact that a few testators had leased their slaves to others; freedom was to be granted after the leases expired, at unspecified time periods. A few slaves were apprenticed to tradesmen for a specified time; freedom occurred when the apprenticeship ended.

In many cases, conditions undoubtedly increased the probability that slaves would not realize freedom. A variety of occurrences after a testator's death might thwart his wishes: executors might die, and slaves could be sold to new owners or could become increasingly vulnerable to having their manumissions challenged or conveniently forgotten by heirs (or others for whom they worked). Of course, the passage of years also increased the likelihood that a slave would die before freedom came due.²⁸

²⁸ For a slave infant who survived until around the age of four, life expectancy was close to 40 years (Robert S. Corruccini, Jerome S. Handler, Robert J. Mutaw, and Frederick W. Lange, "Osteology of a Slave Burial Population from Barbados, West Indies," *American Journal of Physical Anthropology*, LIX [1982], 443-459).

Except for five small children to be freed on reaching specified ages, there is no significant correlation between manumission conditions and the slave's sex, age group, or phenotype. Similarly, no statistical relationship exists between the occurrence of bequests and the presence of conditions. However, slaves receiving a bequest also tended to have their freedom specified immediately or shortly after the testator's death; only seventeen of the forty-three slaves with bequests had their manumissions delayed because of conditions.

The wills and deeds rarely give a reason for manumission, even a general one; when they do, they emphasize the granting of freedom as a reward for particularly conscientious and loyal domestic service. Thus we find such phrases as "in consideration of the care and faithful service done me by my proper Negro slave," "true and faithful service," "honesty and faithful service," and "faithful careful service and slavery . . . in this my long time of sickness [and] weakness." These expressions signify a very special personal relationship between owner and slave. (That is, the owner viewed the relationship as special; how the slave viewed it, we cannot, of course, determine from our data.) For such a relationship to develop, owner and slave must have lived in close contact over a long period. A slave's occupation was, we believe, the most significant variable affecting his or her chances to achieve the proximity that could lead to a close personal tie.

An overwhelming, though nonquantifiable, majority of Barbados's slaves worked at agricultural or other income-producing tasks. It is therefore striking that (except for small children) most, if not all, of the will and deed manumittedes were domestics. As a domestic, or house servant, a slave had ample opportunity to perform the personal services that could win special favor and perhaps ultimately lead to freedom. Since personal service entailed close interaction and communication between slave and master, slaves with the greatest opportunities for becoming domestics probably spoke English and were relatively well adapted to Euro-Barbadian culture. Some may have been creoles, others African. Although we have almost no data on the manumittedes' place of birth, by the 1660s Barbados contained, in the words of a contemporary, "many thousands of slaves that speak English, either born there or brought young into the country," and by the late seventeenth century or early eighteenth most slaves were probably creoles and spoke English.²⁹

In some cases manumission may have been a reward to a mistress (who was also a domestic), but we do not know whether the sexual relationship evolved from her position as a domestic or whether she became a domestic because of an already existing relationship. Scholars have often maintained that in New World slave societies manumitted women frequently had been the concubines of their owners. Although the manumission of slave mistresses apparently became fairly common in Barbados by the late eighteenth century and early nineteenth, our evidence suggests

²⁹ "Some Observations on the Island Barbadoes," 1667, C.O. 1/21, no. 170, P.R.O.; Handler and Lange, *Plantation Slavery in Barbados*, 29.

that the freeing of mistresses, if it occurred, was statistically insignificant in the seventeenth century. Richard Dunn, for example, although acknowledging the rarity of manumission throughout the seventeenth-century English Caribbean, asserts that West Indian planters "occasionally granted freedom to slaves who were neither their concubines nor their children"; he implies that planters' mistresses and children received manumission more frequently than others. Dunn's assertions cannot be directly documented for Barbados (or, we suspect, for other colonies), since the wills and deeds do not specify sexual or kin relations between slaveowners and slaves. It is thus entirely conjectural if a manumitted woman had been the mistress of her manumitter.³⁰

No statistical relationship exists in the will sample between the testator's sex and the sex of the adult slave. If there was a tendency to manumit mistresses, we should find a significantly greater proportion of female slaves freed by men than by women. The lack of this statistical relationship argues against the hypothesis that concubines enjoyed better prospects for manumission than did other slave women. This finding does not mean that none of the manumitted female adults (perhaps also some of the older "girls") had been mistresses. Although the wills and deeds do not specify sexual relationships, the will sample suggests possibilities: twenty-four *adult females* were manumitted by *males*; any mistresses would have belonged to this group, constituting 19.5 percent of the sample. Thus, although some adult females may have been manumitted because of sexual relationship with owners, the wills indicate that such cases were, at best, a minority.

It has also been claimed that the "mulatto" offspring of slave-white relations had superior chances for manumission. Without providing any numbers, Dunn states that "in the wills of early island colonists [in the English West Indies in general], mulatto children figure rather more prominently" and indicates that white fathers freed these children. While we do not deny that some slaves may have received manumission from their fathers, our data do not support a view that "mulatto" children "figure rather more prominently" in wills and that their manumission has statistical significance.³¹ Indeed, only five slaves (freed by four males) in the will sample can be definitely identified as nonadult "mulattoes." Most manumitted "mulattoes" (71 percent) were nonadults, but because there are so few of them, the statistical relationship between phenotype and age group is not significant. Neither can it be demonstrated that the five were the offspring of their manumitters, because the wills never mention or allude to white kinship affiliations with slaves.

³⁰ Handler, *Unappropriated People*, 33-34, 50-53; Dunn, *Sugar and Slaves*, 254-255.

³¹ Dunn, *Sugar and Slaves*, 254. Of 17th-century Virginia, Wesley Frank Craven writes, "it has been assumed that a considerable number of the colony's free Negroes were mulattoes who had achieved their freedom through manumission by their own fathers. But we actually know very little about the mulatto" (*White, Red, and Black: The Seventeenth-Century Virginian* [Charlottesville, Va., 1971], 102).

Three wills manumitting “mulatto” children contain special features suggesting sentiments that *might* imply the testator’s paternity. John Lea directed that a girl “be put to school” and that a boy receive a small legacy and be “bound as an apprentice to a cooper if he like the trade or to any other [trade].” Relative to the will sample, these provisions reflect an exceptional interest in the children’s future welfare and security. In addition, Lea appears to have been poor, the two children may have been his only slaves, and his will suggests that he lacked a spouse or white children—factors that also indicate the possibility that Lea was the father of his manumitted. John Jemott, a planter with no wife when he drafted his will, manumitted two slaves: a woman and her “mulatto pequaniny.” Although both were to be freed ten years after Jemott’s death and neither received a bequest, he may have been manumitting his mistress and his own child. The planter James Lord left his wife all his “Negro slaves, excepting one mulatto”: Richard, a boy, received no bequest but was to be set free at age twenty-one. The will’s sole exceptional feature is its unusual length with the names of many heirs; Richard’s name appears very early, perhaps reflecting Lord’s special interest in him. Five other male wills, involving nine children (including “probable mulattoes” and those without an identifiable phenotype), show some special features that might suggest, but do not demonstrate, testator paternity. Thus, although the wills (and deeds) do not directly support the notion that white fathers manumitted their children, an inferential case can occasionally be made. However, the evidence strongly indicates that such manumissions, if they occurred, applied to few slaves and that parenthood was a minor element in the manumission process. The will sample also tends to confirm an impression gleaned from Barbadian sources for the later periods of slavery: children born of alliances between white males and nonwhite women were occasionally set free, but having a white father far from guaranteed manumission.³²

We noted that the will sample indicates that “mulattoes” had a slight selective advantage for manumission. However, with the exception of small children, all of the sample’s few “mulattoes” would have been house servants. In the light of data from the later years of slavery, when proportionately more “mulattoes” were manumitted, the advantage suggested by the wills may have related to the possibility that “mulattoes” were in a relatively favorable position to become domestics.³³

In summary, it appears that employment as a domestic servant, in close physical proximity to the master or mistress, offered the best opportunity for frequent interaction and performance of highly valued personal services. A continuing positive performance might cause an owner to view the slave in a special way, and this, in turn, could—but need not—lead to

³² Some “mulatto” adults in the sample may have been the grown children of their manumitters. However, there are only two positive cases of adult “mulattoes” (females), and nothing unusual in the wills suggests a relationship. Handler, *Unappropriated People*, 33-34, 51-54, 199-200.

³³ *Ibid.*, 53-54; cf., Dunn, *Sugar and Slaves*, 254.

manumission. Demographic characteristics of manumittedes suggest that the special relationship deriving from domestic service favored adult females and male children; together, these two categories constituted 64 percent of the manumitted will sample.

Whether a slave manumitted in a will was actually freed is another matter. It must be emphasized that we do not know how many of the 123 slaves in our sample ultimately became freedmen; we have positive evidence only for the three manumitted by deed through executor action (Type I). As we have indicated, many slaves in the will sample probably were never freed. Even if all 123 achieved freedom, however, the act of manumission (including also that by deed and legislative or court action) was very rare. This rarity largely explains the numerical insignificance of freedmen in Barbados during the seventeenth century.