THE EFFECTS OF INSTITUTIONALIZED SLAVERY ON ENSLAVED WOMEN IN JAMAICA

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The study of demographics of the slave trade in Jamaica provides a valuable insight into the impact of slavery on the overall standard of living of enslaved women. Slavery is often characterized as a time of oppression that is expressed through the lives of men, ultimately leaving women marginalized. This generalization ultimately ignores the multi-layered forms of dehumanization many enslaved women faced across Jamaica. This research explores the impact of slavery on the lives of women across Jamaica through an arduous journey of labor, sexual abuse and reproductive complexities. As the lives of enslaved women were drastically uprooted, the dehumanized nature of slave plantations often destroyed their spiritual and maternal responsibilities. As various plantation owners and slave holders discovered maternity and fertility as an essential way to regenerate a laboring population, this ideology ultimately forced enslaved women to birth children, who, in successive generations, would become slaves themselves. Constantly faced with the fear of insurrection and found freedom, plantation owners unified in their ideology that enslaved women controlled the means of the population on slave plantations across Jamaica.

ABSTRACT

The study of demographics of the slave trade in Jamaica provides a valuable insight into the impact of slavery on the overall standard of living of enslaved women. Slavery is often characterized as a time of oppression that is expressed through the lives of men, ultimately leaving women marginalized. This generalization ultimately ignores the multi-layered forms of dehumanization many enslaved women faced across Jamaica. This research explores the impact of slavery on the lives of women across Jamaica through an arduous journey of labor, sexual abuse and reproductive complexities. As the lives of enslaved women were drastically uprooted, the dehumanized nature of slave plantations often destroyed their spiritual and maternal responsibilities. As various plantation owners and slave holders discovered maternity and fertility as an essential way to regenerate a laboring population, this ideology ultimately forced enslaved women to birth children, who, in successive generations, would become slaves themselves. Constantly faced with the fear of insurrection and found freedom, plantation owners unified in their ideology that enslaved women controlled the means of the population on slave plantations across Jamaica.
As the ideology of women through the eyes of European oppressors began to form, African women were excluded from the ideology of what beauty entailed. Masking the hatred for African women, European expression of a racial stereotypes allowed others to fall into the trap of the notion of an African woman being muscular with masculine build and sub human traits. Not only does this belief in African women evolve into a means of suppression, it formulated a larger separation between the beauty of a white European woman and that of an African woman. The evolved racialized discourses confirmed by the actions of a European's idea of cultural superiority allowed for the creation of justified power over 'inferior peoples'. Although it is difficult to not generalize about numerous societies that were ethnically and culturally different from one another, African societies had a centralized aspect of what motherhood entailed. African women who were mothers were central to the transmission of family cultures, traditions and values.
The assumptions about the ease of childbirth in African societies persisted to the modern era which perpetuated the ideology that women were able to replenish slave populations on plantations. The effect of this notion on women on plantation societies caused some of the highest mortality rates among African women.

- Europeans ignoring the dangerous nature of childbirth in order to force slave reproduction.
- No matter the location, childbirth remained as, if not more, hazardous, with a high incidence of gynecological complications which was a direct result of the labor and physical treatment of African slaves.
Racial Stereotypes

- As slave holders faced a considerable shift in population density, enslaved women encountered heightened responsibilities in regard to their daily work.
- The notion of male slaves being stronger and more capable of performing hard labor caused the exploitation of females to achieve productivity goals to increase.

The assertion that enslaved women were less capable than men even though enslaved women worked alongside the men clearing fields for planting, digging cane holes and cutting and carrying canes from the fields to the factories. Women also played a key role in the distribution of supplies to various parts of the plantations. Women also had the responsibilities of supplying fuel for the boilers, feeding canes to the mills and removing its residual trash. During harvest time, women worked in the cane fields from sunrise to sunset alongside the men and at nights labored on a shift system to keep apace the processing of sugar cane.
Thomas Thistlewood at the age of twenty-nine, was aboard the Flying Flamborough on the 24th of April 1750 headed to Jamaica. Thomas Thistlewood failed to establish himself as a successful farmer in Tupholme, Lincolnshire, which ultimately caused him to seek fortune in Jamaica.[1] As a brutal slave owner who often resorted to sexual abuse and severe punishment, Thistlewood quickly became one of the largest plantation and slave owners in Jamaica.

"Whipped slaves, rubbed salt, lemon juice, and urine into the wounds; made a slave defecate into the mouth of another slave and then gagged the unfortunate recipient of this gift and chained slaves overnight in bilboes."

Thomas Thistlewood
White European men constructed the ideology that African slave women were promiscuous and constantly asked for sex. This notion that African slave women were promiscuous prompted slave holders and plantation owners to make sexual advances on the slaves, which ultimately led to the high rate of sexual abuse.

European white men not only invoked their power over African women in ways of psychological control, they used physical power to control the beliefs and actions of women.
Later that night he shove Bacchus’ head on a stick and plant the stick right in front of the slave quarters, where Bacchus stay until he rot off. Knowing who Bacchus’s sister be, a house slave who not yet fourteen, he drag her from great house to the stable, where he rape her and leave him seed in her. Wilkins say they must teach the negroes a lesson. That Saturday, the negroes get the learning. In the morning when the womens washing before they go to the field, Wilkins ride up and grab Leto, a girl who not be sixteen yet. Leto scream. One hour or so later he summon all the slave to one of the empty fields. This is what happen to you when you cross with your master! Jack Wilkins say. In the middle of the field was bundles of stick and bush. In the middle of the bundle was a tree trunk. Tied to the tree trunk was Leto who screaming, pleading and crying.”
Thomas Thistlewood regularly wrote about his sexual experiences in a way that was easily translated as each was characterized by an event that incorporated a time, date and person. Thomas Thistlewood incorporated as much detail as he could about his encounters as he inevitably wrote about if others were present and if he made any form of payment to his victim. The descriptions provided by Thistlewood shows through his own personal account of his many rapes as acts rather than taking into account the emotions and perspective of the enslaved woman. It is also important to highlight his diaries never incorporated information as to how his sexual encounters occurred.

Over the course thirty-seven years:
- Thistlewood engaged in 3,852 acts of sexual intercourse
- Thistlewood had sexual intercourse with 138 women
- 108 times with 14 different partners as the intensity of his sexual activity varied

As Thistlewood's actions peaked in 1754:
- Thistlewood had sexual encounters 265 times
- Thistlewood declined to 200 encounters in his thirties
- Over 100 sexual encounters in his forties and fifties
- 80 sex acts in the last decade of his life per year
Slave Women and Reproduction

In the second half of the eighteenth century approximately 50% of the slaves on Jamaican sugar estates were women. Although there was a strong percentage of women on various estates, the overall gross reproduction rates did not reflect this high percentage. This was caused from slave owners who bought slaves rather than focusing on breeding slaves and supporting their pregnancies.

Soon after the legal end to the British Slave Trade in 1807, the overall viewpoint of the slave owners drastically changed. Without an influx of slaves to import to various plantations, planters and overseers had to resort to breeding in order to keep the population of slaves from falling too low.
Jamaica imported 575,000 Africans and 60% of those who were imported were male. Slave purchases ended in 1807 and by 1834, the Jamaican slave population fell by 43,000 – a decline of 12 percent. This decline was not only caused by the end of the slave trade, but from aged slaves who died as well as runaways. Not only does the decline in population show the failure of breeding in order to curb the population decline, it showed the drastic measures of plantation owners were not as calculated as they could have been.
The disorientation, disease and punishment took a severe toll on many slave women which caused women to stop menstruating due to stress. Under the extreme conditions women were under, the desire and ability to have children was dramatically reduced. Women were faced with emotional amenorrhea and secondary amenorrhea that was caused by illness and the sudden change in their environment.[1] The loss of excitement to fulfill the duties of motherhood emphasizes how the notion of slavery attacked the most fundamental basis of an African women identity and her ability to continue lineage.
In simple terms, plantation owners needed to work slaves hard to keep up output levels on sugar plantations, the more so after the end to the British Slave Trade. Political tensions between those who wanted to breed African slaves and those who did not, who were on the side of abolishing slavery all together, caused an enormous rift between plantations. Those who were against the forced nature of reproduction among slave women was due to the conditions slaves were forced to work under. Harm to the fetus during pregnancy often times resulted in a miscarriage or stillbirth as the mother was not healthy while being forced in unnatural positions while working in the fields.
Enslaved women had a diet that contained grain, vegetables and dried fish. Unfortunately, in some cases, women were unable to carry to term due to an inadequate level of nutrition. On various plantations across Jamaica, women were forced to provide provisions for themselves instead of relying on the master's rations.

The average diet of an enslaved woman lacked the necessary nutrients like thiamine, vitamin A and calcium which affected their overall fertility. On average, food that was supplied on plantations amounted to approximately 1,500 to 2,000 calories and approximately 45 grams of protein per day. Average conditions for men require roughly 3200 calories per day and women require approximately 2300 calories per day. Under conditions of exceptionally heavy labor, male and females need about 450 more calories in order to work properly.[1]
An inadequate diet had an enormous effect on the fertility and overall physiology of enslaved women. In order for women to properly menstruate, women need to take in three times the amount of iron into their bodies. Enslaved women also required 30 to 50 percent more calcium and thiamine than men in order to properly lactate while pregnant or breastfeeding. Enslaved women who were deficient in nutrients faced irregularities in menstruation making it difficult to conceive.
Geophagy

The existence of geophagy among slave populations in Jamaica was a practice thousands of slaves have used. Slave owners and plantation overseers had clear attitudes in regard to the slaves eating dirt, for example, a Jamaican planter stated: “nothing is more horribly disgusting, nothing more to be dreaded, nothing exhibiting a more heart-rending, ghastly spectacle, than a negro child possessed of the malady”. [1]

Although it is clear that plantation owners viewed this form of nutrition as atrocious and degrading, one can contextualize the planters showed some form of fear. It became apparent to plantation owners once slaves were hooked on geophagy; it was nearly impossible to break them from the habit. As a form of addictive behavior, slaves did whatever they could to combat the lack of nutrition in their regular diets did not consist of.
Food Ration and Diet

The overall connection between geophagy and the complex relation it had on a slave’s humanity, many plantation owners viewed a slave who ingested dirt as a creature, for example, “the ill slave becomes a creature rather than a human being, the dirt deprives the slave of her or his humanity”.

This account of an non-human trait allows plantation owners and overseers to justify their viewpoint on slaves being an inferior people ultimately rendering them creatures. Due to the belief that geophagy affected creatures, plantation owners rarely took responsibility for the slave’s habit of dirt eating. Plantation owners commonly attributed dirt eating as a punishable offence on behalf of the slave instead of taking into account the slave looking for other ways of getting nutrition.
Female Jamaican slaves, pregnant or not, were subject to extreme labor until six weeks before expected delivery. Once it became apparent that plantations needed to begin the process of reproduction since the option to import slaves was no longer feasible, plantation overseers excused women from field work when it was known that they were pregnant and placed them outside of the great gang into the second gang with lighter tasks.[1]

Planters were obviously aware of the risks they imposed on pregnant enslaved women they owned, but placed the women back in the field four months later and required them to work in a less demanding atmosphere as long as they were still breastfeeding.
In the case of Thomas Thistlewood, his most treasured enslaved woman, Phibbah, was pregnant with his child all while still working in the great house. It was stated in Thistlewood’s diaries that she often times overstepped his view of proper authority, but was rarely punished due to her close relationship with Thistlewood. As Phibbah gave birth on the 28th of January:
"ON THE 28TH, OLD DAPHNE AME OVER FROM SALT RIVER TO ATTEND TO HER, AND AT ABOUT 8 O’CLOCK IN THE MORNING OF TUESDAY, 29TH APRIL 1760, SHE WAS DELIVERED OF A BOY. HOUSE FRANKE WAS SENT OVER FROM PARADISE TO LOOK AFTER HER FOR A FEW DAYS, AND EGYPT LUCY WAS KEPT AT HOME GIVING PHIBBAH’S CHILD SUCK. FOR A DAY OR SO PHIBBAH WAS UNWELL WITH A BAD LOOSENESS AND, ON HEARING OF IT FROM THISTLEWOOD, MRS COPE SENT HER FLOUR, WINE, CINNAMON. AT THE END OF THE WEEK HOUSE FRANKE WAS RECALLED TO PARADISE AND WENT LADEN WITH GIFTS, A CUBA TEAL AND A DIVER FOR HERSELF, AND A ROASTING PIG FOR MRS COPE. IN HER PLACE, MR MOULD’S FRANKE CAME TO TAKE OER THE EGYPT COOKHOUSE UNTIL PHIBBAH WAS UP AND ABOUT AGAIN".[1]
Slave owners and overseers showed little mercy in punishing pregnant women and often followed the normal treatment they would have received if not pregnant. Thomas Thistlewood, who was a plantation owner in Westmoreland parish regularly flogged slaves of both sexes and hired out his pregnant women at the full rate of pay for field laborers until they were within two or three months of delivery.[1] Until the growing attention to the treatment of pregnant slaves. It was common practice at the time to place enslaved women in holes on their stomachs to be able to flog them on the back. The lack of accommodations enslaved women faced while pregnant sometimes caused a prolapsed uterus or death of the unborn child.
Although a majority of slave insurrections were committed by recently arrived enslaved men, rigorous tasks women faced in the fields on plantations often led to a collective form of resistance that left some plantations with low production. From individual forms of resistance to small groups of women, sabotage and arson were often committed by women to force the plantation to be considered not productive. In working fields on plantations women often formed small groups that would generate resistance in the forms of small revolts and rebellions which made it incredibly difficult for plantations to control the women.
The overall notion that few enslaved women took part in large forms of revolts or insurrections, offers an important insight into the dynamics of plantations in Jamaica. It was evident the control slave masters and overseers had on enslaved women which typically kept them from orchestrating large forms rebellion. Although it was very common for plantations to face some sort of resistance from the women in the fields or in daily tasks, plantations rarely faced insurrections that were solely led by enslaved women.
Women-Led Resistance

The slave trade also faced various ideologies of abolitionists who believed a natural increase was not a matter of replacing the slaves from the slave trade with another supply all while faced with the forced nature of plantation owners treating enslaved people as a dispensable product. Despite widespread beliefs of abolitionists who regarded that slavery should be abolished all together, their main focus was on the slave trade itself.
Women-Led Resistance

It is important to note the idealization that enslaved women had no agency and were not seen in society to have any merit, nor any acknowledgement of being a human or any ability to push back in a way that was troublesome for plantation owners.
ON NUMEROUS JAMAICAN SLAVE PLANTATIONS, MORTALITY AND MISCARRIAGES WERE MORE ATTRIBUTABLE TO INFECTIOUS DISEASE THAN TO MALNUTRITION OR PHYSICAL MISTREATMENT. MANY OF THE INFECTIOUS DISEASES HAD DEVASTATING EFFECTS ON PREGNANCY AND THE OVERALL ABILITY TO REPRODUCE.
Syphilis: Sexually transmitted infection that is caused by a bacterial infection. Without treatment, those who are infected with syphilis can face heart, brain and organ damage.

Yaws: Contagious disease that is caused by bacteria entering broken skin abrasions and causes crusted lesions that ultimately develop into deep ulcers of the skin.

Smallpox: An acute contagious viral disease, with fever and pustules usually leaving permanent scars.

Measles: An infectious viral disease causing fever and a red rash on the skin.

Scarlet fever: Bacterial illness that develops in some people who have strep throat. Also features a bright red rash that covers most of the body.

Dysentery: Gastroenteritis that results in diarrhea with blood. Other symptoms may include fever, abdominal pain, and a feeling of incomplete defecation and dehydration.

Elephantiasis: Is the enlargement of limbs that is caused by parasites that enter the body.
Infectious Diseases and Reproduction

Although the various diseases mentioned previously were common and not confined to just pregnant women; pregnant slaves had a heightened susceptibility to diseases due to a lower immunity level.

In most cases, once pregnant slaves caught one of the previously mentioned diseases, it would most likely result in stillbirth, miscarriage or premature labor.
IN MANY CASES, PLANTATION OWNERS BLAMED ENSLAVED WOMEN FOR BEING PROMISCUOUS, WHICH WOULD LEAD TO THE LACK OF FERTILITY DUE TO VENEREAL COMPLAINTS. ON PLANTATIONS RUN BY SIMON TAYLOR AND JOHN WEDDERBURN, SLAVES OFTEN FACED BLAME FOR THEIR ‘SEXUAL ACTIONS’. PLANTATION OWNERS RESORTED TO BLAME IN ORDER TO COMBAT THE REALITIES OF LOW NUMBERS ON THEIR PLANTATIONS. ACCORDING TO DR. THOMAS DANCER, WHO WAS A PHYSICIAN IN JAMAICA, STATED “ONLY 0.5 PERCENT OF A SAMPLE OF 2,394 SLAVES LIVING ON THE JAMAICAN ESTATES WERE INFECTED WITH VENEREAL DISEASE”. 

Infectious Diseases and Reproduction
Enslaved women used various herbs and infusions for contraceptive purposes. Plants such as okra and aloe were transported to Jamaica and were often used as abortifacients. Plantation owners and overseers often scolded enslaved women for the practice of self-abortion. In some cases, enslaved women on plantations practiced being an ‘obeahmen’ otherwise known as a practitioner who aided women in pursuing abortion.[1] Plantation owners made it evident that if an enslaved woman were to be found of having an abortion, she would be sent to away to perform arduous manual labor.
From the viewpoint of slave women’s dedication to children and motherhood, it seems unlikely that self-abortion would have been a common occurrence on plantations. Enslaved women at the time were fully aware of the risks of abortion which causes me to believe abortions may have been more common for younger aged slaves. Without common knowledge of the risks associated with abortion, young females would have had issues with hemorrhaging, septicemia and even the risk of death.

It is far more feasible that stillborn deaths and miscarriages were associated with arduous labor. To some extent it is difficult to conclude if children were born prematurely or not due to 80 percent of infant deaths occurring soon after the child had survived at least a week.[1] The health of the child depended solely on the health and overall nutritional intake of the mother. Given the environment of little nutrition, heinous labor conditions and brutal physical punishment, it was often the case that children did not survive.
Instances of miscarriages, stillbirths and the death of infants within a few days of birth between 1762 and 1831 on the Mesopotamia plantation in Jamaica recorded only **half** of the pregnancies of the enslaved women made it to term; reports from Vere parish suggested **half** of their pregnancies also ended in miscarriage and at Worthy Park, Rose Price owned **240** female slaves and at the time only **72.5** percent had reached or passed through childbearing years. [1] Some of the **37.1** percent of his women had given birth approximately **352** times, but live births only accounted for about **275** which indicated one miscarriage for every **4.6** live births or **18** percent.
In a set of rules offered to plantation owners, enslaved women were encouraged to go to a lying-in house that was attended to by a midwife. If the child and mother survived, the midwife would be awarded 10 shillings, while the mother was given a linen frock for herself and her child. There was considerable difficulty to persuade female slaves to have birth in lying-in houses. Many female slaves were unwilling to leave the comforts of their own homes to give birth in lying-in houses because those who were sick were treated alongside expectant mothers in the lying-in houses.
Many slave plantations designated elderly women and mothers as caregivers during the time of another slave giving birth. On John Tharp’s estate in 1805, there were seven women who were listed as midwives between the ages of thirty and sixty.[1] Planters often blamed the midwives for the unsuccessful childbirths and argued they were unskilled and not in the appropriate conditions to care for a mother in labor. This notion perpetuated by plantation owners and overseers is another example of stereotypes controlling the means of enslaved women. Midwives were essential in the birthing process on plantations. The skills midwives possessed were traditions and practices that took generations to master as slaves passed the skills down through their families.
The traumatic pressures and implications African slave women were faced with had an enormous and destructive effect on the kinship structures within which birth, motherhood and childrearing practices and rituals were embedded into culture. Although women predominated in the internal slave trade in Africans, they are estimated to have compromised only on average one third of captives sent to the Americas.[1] Children constituted only 19% of captives shipped to Jamaica from 1764 through 1788, of this 19%, children between 10 and 16 constituted 14% of those transported to the British Caribbean from 1683 to 1791.
In most cases, African families were faced with the notion that many European slave owners were reluctant to capture young children and young women since they took up desirable space on ships which could have been filled by men who were slightly older and more suitable to plantation labor. Slave owners were also concerned in the case of a woman giving birth on the ship before reaching its intended location. The chances of survival were not only compromised for the child, but the mother’s chance of survival was non-existent. In the cases of survival, most ship owners would sever all ties to the mother by killing the babies in order to be able to sell the mothers once the ship arrived.[1].
One aspect of slave childrearing culture that many plantation owners and overseers wanted to eradicate was the practice of late weaning of slave children and infants. This practice was often blamed by plantation owners for the low rates of reproduction since the practice was linked to a two-year post-natal period many enslaved women practiced as a form of contraception and protection. The continual practice of late weaning provides strong evidence that enslaved women carried their African cultures with them to various plantations as a form of resistance. When weaning houses were introduced in Jamaica to cut down on the extended period of time enslaved women devoted to breastfeeding, mothers strongly resisted this separation from their children.
The overall desire to have children was affected by the lack of incentive due to the fear of being separated once the enslaved woman had her child. This form of resistance not only kept reproduction levels low, the overall pressure on plantation owners and overseers rose as they tried to combat low population numbers. Undoubtedly a complex relationship between mothers and the responsibilities of being a mother were directly interrupted and destroyed under the institutionalized system of slavery. The overall horrors of the Middle Passage, enslavement and sexual abuse were all triggers that prevented enslaved women from carrying on their African born traditions of motherhood and pregnancy.
As slavery drastically declined, workhouses were experiments by plantation owners and slave holders to see how much productive labor could be extracted from a ‘free’ person. Because Jamaican workhouses went under direct scrutiny of abolitionists in regard to the physical treatment and power that was exercised on the bodies of female slaves, the workhouses became the center for free or runaway slaves that were caught breaking the law. Throughout 1834 to 1838, Jamaica was under a period of Apprenticeship where all children under the age of six were freed. Other slaves were also declared freed, but under a condition of apprenticed part-time work to their old masters. Eventually, the treatment of those who were sent to the workhouses went under direct scrutiny by the public in April of 1838 an act was passed that tried to combat the abuse the plantation owners and overseers placed upon women. Rather than conforming to political and public opinion, the overall apprenticeship period was abolished in August of 1838.
Jamaican Workhouses

Operated by a committee of men that consisted of a chief magistrate of the parish and five justices followed by local planters that formed the hierarchy of the workhouse system. The committee appointed white officers as supervisors of the treadmill as well as the creation of rules and guidelines that the slaves had to follow, for example, the ‘rule of silence’ that forced slaves to not talk to others while at work.[1] The members of the committee were also required to regularly inspect the living quarters of the slaves as well as other rooms throughout the parishes. In cases where members of the committee witnessed cases of abuse, they were required to report it to the governor which resulted in the prosecution of the workhouse overseers.
Jamaican Workhouse Treadmill
The treadmill was also a destructive way to enforce obedience and submissiveness. The overall speed and tenacity of the treadmill often caused a “free” person who’d been convicted of some offense to fall while the mill was still moving that gave slaves horrendous injuries and often times many died. The severe pain and punishment the treadmill gave to slaves destroyed all hopes of humane treatment, newly found freedom in civilization and overall respect for the human body. Often times, slaves were placed on the mill for more than the allotted time as a form of punishment and deliberate force to physically and mentally harm the slaves. In cases of slaves sentenced to more time on the mill, overseers often kicked the slaves as a form of physical coercion to force the slaves back on. Bella Richard who was a young pregnant woman was kicked and sent back on the mill as a form of punishment for her various ‘crimes’. In addition to the forced nature of the mill, overseers often bound slaves to the mill as it was spinning to physically harm the slaves when they couldn’t keep up with the speed of the mill.

Effects of the Treadmill

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Jamaican Workhouses

The most common form of punishment that enslaved females faced on the parishes of workhouses was the pain of flogging. Usually women were flogged for not following instructions or disobeying direct orders from their masters and overseers. Although flogging went directly against the Abolition Act, many women were flogged as a form of punishment. Many members of the committee, however, justified the practice by pointing out that when female apprentices entered the workhouse they were no longer subject to the Abolition Act but the 1834 act for making further provision for the building, repairing and regulating of gaols, houses of correction, hospitals and asylums which allowed any ordinary justice to inflict corporal punishment on inmates who disobeyed the rules and delegate his power to punish to the supervisor and drivers of the institution.[1]
The January 1792 slave schedules of Golden Grove’s plantation registered 204 females to 237 males.[1] This shows that women accounted for just about 46 percent of the total slave population. Of these women, 25 were above the age of 70 years and beyond the years of childbearing. Girls with the greatest reproductive promise aged 9 to 17 and accounted for another 42 of the Golden Grove’s 204 females. A majority of the women however, were field workers between the ages of 30 to 70 years old since their reproductive potential was much lower than the others. In later years, in 1817, showed 117.8 males to 100 females. The significance of these statistics shows the change in the importation of slaves into Jamaica along with the rapid decline in slave populations. As the atmosphere surrounding slavery changed, plantation owners struggled to keep their numbers up in order to be productive, and the example mentioned above in regard to Golden Grove’s plantation, it is easy for one to contextualize the importance a slave population had on the successes and economic stability they created.
Parishes with large urban areas, like Kingston and St. Catherine, generally had a larger female population. With a bulk of the slave population falling between the ages of 25 and 44, females above the age of 12 were considered by slaveholders as best suited for birthing future laborers. Slave holders had a higher demand for young females within childbearing years to combat the decline in the slave population due to the governmental trading policies provided tax relief on the importation of females below the age of 25.
Overall, the study of enslaved women in Jamaica provides a valuable insight into the horrendous treatment they faced on a daily basis. Slavery is often characterized into a large content field in which gender is rarely emphasized. In most cases of slave research, women are excluded or rarely mentioned, as most scholarship focuses on enslaved men. As research of enslaved women becomes more prominent, historians and scholars are able to contextualize the deeply institutionalized notions of slavery, white Europeans created. The dehumanized nature of slave plantations as well as slave owners destroyed women in Jamaica in such a way that their spiritual and maternal practices were ultimately eradicated. The traumatic pressures and responsibilities enslaved women in Jamaica faced were unprecedented. Constantly encountered with sexual abuse, coercion and severe physical punishment, enslaved women in Jamaica were at the center of white ignorance. As a historian, it is imperative to analyze and research all aspects of a time in history to give all demographics and genders the proper recognition in scholarship. The slave trade in Jamaica deeply impacted the lives of women in such a manner that institutionalized racism, stereotypes and severe coercive actions fostered the notion of slavery for hundreds of years.


“Female Cook In Her Kitchen.” Slavery and Remembrance, United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization


James, Kathryn. Thistlewood Archive.


Reed, Jennifer. Sites of Terror.


