Forms of Political Control: British, French and Spanish Caribbean

Caribbean History
Carlos Quiroz
“The trouble with quotes on the internet is that you never know whether or not they are genuine.”

-Abraham Lincoln
Slave Control in the Caribbean

**Control** definition: TO DIRECT THE ACTIONS OR FUNCTIONS OF SOMEONE OR SOMETHING; TO CAUSE SOMEONE OR SOMETHING TO ACT OR FUNCTION IN A CERTAIN WAY.

**Why the need for slave control?** The arrival of new African slaves to the Caribbean resulted in an increase in the African slave population in the territories. This resulted in the increase fear amongst the “plantocracy” towards slaves outnumbering their ability to properly control them. With this, a series of “black code” and “Police Laws” policies were implemented in the British, French and Spanish Caribbean.
Social Organisation of the British Caribbean Society in 18th Century

Whites
- Born in Europe, or in the Caribbean of European parents
- Held all the political power
- Controlled most of the land

Coloureds
- Mixed European & African parentage born in the Caribbean
- Separate from whites by law
- Limited amount of land
- No political power

Slaves
- Born in Africa or of African parents in the Caribbean
- Separated from whites by law
- No political power
- No legal rights
- Constantly resisting condition
Powers of the Planters in the British Caribbean

- Magistrates
- Justices of the peace
- Collecting constable
- Parish Vestries: committee of leaders
- Custos: keeper of Records
- Office of the Militia
Slave control in the British Caribbean

- **Deficiency Act** —main purpose was to create the right ratio of enslaved with a large enough proportion of free Europeans on the plantation

- 1 European - 10 African slave

- In the case of Jamaica 1 European – 11 African slave
“Police Laws”: British Caribbean

Suppression of Culture

• Blocked traditional celebrations by prohibiting music, dancing or buying alcohol
• Illegal to blow horns, beat drums or assemble in large numbers

Restriction on mobility

• Illegal to carry weapons
• Tickets giving destination & time of return
Con’t- “Police Laws”: British Caribbean

Break up of the Family and African leadership

• Mixed gangs so that they held Africans with different backgrounds & languages

• Rotate males to prevent leadership roles

• Cheaper to buy young adult African slaves than having a child raised on the plantation (discouraged procreation and less children to carry down African culture)
Con’t- Slave control in the British Caribbean

• **Education** - No education for slaves up to the Mid 18th Century

• Case of Barbados - in 1797 an act passed to allow Anglican Priests to convert slaves but cannot teach them to read

• **MYTH OF THE ILLITERATE SLAVES**
Islam in the Americas

- Omar Ibn Said

"Then there came to our country a big army. It killed many people. It took me, and walked me to the big Sea, and sold me into hands of a Christian man."

—Omar Ibn Said

- Born in 1770
- West Africa
- Sold of into slavery in America
- 1831 wrote his autobiography
- Only surviving slave narrative in Arabic
Enforcers of law and order in British Caribbean

- **The Militia**: all abled body white males were required to enrol. Coloured and black males were often times allowed because of whites attitude towards it. White employees couldn’t get time off & most refused to serve only as officers.

- **British Troops**: garrison of regular British Troops stationed in Jamaica, Barbados and Leewards.

- **Constables**: urban slaves- domestics, artisans and boatman and fishermen. Called in to assist – often times as “jumpers”
Women under slavery

Provide sexual services to European planters, overseers and even visitors (seen Django Unchained?)

Effects

- Dislike by European women and fellow male enslaved

Children – neither European nor African

- Left to raise children alone
Control Policies: Free Coloureds

Manumission

Reward for long and obedient service/fighting off other European invader

In the case of Belize:
• Self purchase
• Purchase by others
• Bequest by will and testament of the owner
• Gift of the owner
(Bolland 2009:65)

Children of European men & Enslaved mother
Manumission in Belize

declaring that it had never consented to the suggestion, and that “the frequent expulsions” of the logwood-cutters had never been opposed by the Court of England. Claims that “the right, dominion, property and possession” of the King of Spain is indisputable.

1737.

1737, February 3rd. M.S.R.
A record of a manumission dated “on the Third Day of February on board the said Ship Torrington now riding at anchor at the River Mo. Beleze Honduras Bay Anno Dni 1737-8.”

1739.

Instructions by Newcastle to British Envoys.
**Restrictions in British Caribbean**

**Political**
- Could not give evidence against a European in court
- Can’t vote/ hold public office

**Economic**
- Forbidden to own plantations
- Limitations on inheritance (Jamaica <2,000 pounds currency)
- Not allowed to take up carpentry and masonry
Quiz #1

1. The ticket system required slaves to provide two crucial information, ______ and the _______. 2pts

2. What was the main purpose of the “Deficiency Act”? 2pts

3. Explain two ways in which the Police Laws in the British Caribbean suppressed African cultural practices? 6pts
Difference of the French Caribbean from the British Caribbean

French
- Laws and policies decided in France
- Local authority-military governor "intendant"
- Sugar wasn’t as "king" as in British Caribbean-other crops coffee, cocoa and cassava

British
- Well established "plantocracy" politically with greater degree of local autonomy (in case of Belize "Forestocracy")
- Sugar was KING!!!!!!!!!!
• Code Noir

• Siete Partidas

• Individual Assemblies to enact their own laws
French Caribbean Social Structure

**Grand Blancs**
- Planters of large estates of sugar

**Petit Blancs**
- Small holders
- Craftsmen
- Small shopkeepers
- Poorer clerks
- Officials
• Control and treatment of slaves in the French Caribbean
• Drawn up in France in 1685
• Lasted until 1804—replaced by Code Napoléon
• Initially 60 articles
Main Components

1. All slaves to be baptised
2. Slaves not to be worked on Sundays or Holy Days
3. Slave marriage to be encouraged, the owner’s consent having been obtained.
4. Sexual intercourse between master and his slave to be punished by the confiscation of slaves. If between another man and the slave, a fine to be imposed. Children of such unions would take the status of the mother (same concept as the British practise).
5. Slaves to be forbidden to own property and anything they acquired to belong to their owners.
6. Promises, contracts and gifts made by slaves to be null and void.
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8. Slaves to be forbidden to sell sugar, or any other produce, without their owner’s permission.
9. Death penalty to be inflicted for striking master or mistress, and in some cases any free person.
10. Absenteeism lasting over a month to be punished by cutting off ears and branding on the shoulder. The second such absence to be punished by cutting off ears and branding on shoulder. The second such absence to be punished by cutting off the buttock and branding on the other shoulder. A third such absence to be punished by death.
11. Owner to be compensated if slave executed on owner’s own denunciation.
12. Torture and mutilation to be prohibited under penalty of confiscation of the slave.

13. Slaves to be regarded as movable property, and liable to be sold apart from the rest of their family.

14. The plantation and the slaves to be regarded as one.

15. Owners and drivers to treat slaves humanely.

16. Owners to have the right to free a slave after twenty years’ service.

17. Manumitted slaves to have the same rights as free persons.
Spanish- Las Siete Partidas & la Cedula

• Code drawn up in Spain in the 13th Century before slavery in the Caribbean
• Alfonso X
• Believed slavery was contrary to natural justice and that it was an evil, but a necessary evil for the economic development of the colonies
Con’t- The essence of the Siete Partidas
Idea to remove the treat of revolt by other means than repressive legislation

1. Charles I- Attempted to enforce a ratio of 3 to 1 / 4 to 1 of slaves to freemen.
2. Minimum proportion of female slaves, & by encouraging marriage
3. A slave could appeal to the courts against ill treatment.
4. Allowed Manumission – even by periodic repayments
5. Right to provision grounds (similar to British policies)
6. Right to marriage without consent of his owners
7. Owner could not overwork or underfeed his slaves
8. Required all judges to promote liberty because liberty was natural
La Cedula

1680 update – slaves allowed to gather, move about and carry weapons
Baptised and encouraged in the Christian Faith

1789-La Cedula 1789

• Local justices were to decide on the food and clothing that the enslaved must be given
• Provide slaves with a bed and blanket with no more than 2 a room
• Those under 17 or over 60 were not to work and no more than 25 lashes were to be given in a punishment

• Believed the Spanish were the ones to create the least racial distance
Questions to consider

1. What were the ‘white’ planters’ views towards the free coloured?
2. Why was the situation of enslaved women different from that of enslaved men?
3. What was one of the greatest evident outcome of the relationship between planters and enslaved African women?
4. How and why did the slave Codes varied from the British, French and Spanish Caribbean?
5. Which slave codes were the most restrictive?