

A slave-owner's defence of his treatment of the enslaved: Sir Reynold Alleyne in 1824

A committee of the Council of Barbados produced a report in 1824 which sought to defend slavery and the treatment of the enslaved by planters against the 'enemies of the West Indies who had charged that there prevailed 'the grossest injustice...irreligion and immorality...the most unprecedented degradation, and unrelenting cruelty'. One of those who gave evidence to the committee was Sir Reynold Abel Alleyne, whose testimony is given below.

Source:

A Report of a Committee of the Council of Barbadoes, appointed to inquire into the actual condition of the slaves in this island (London, 1824).

(Page numbers in [] refer to the beginning of the page of the report.)

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Examination of Sir Reynold A. Alleyne, Bart, (on Oath).

Query 1. What is your station in this Colony?

Answer. A Member of Council, and Owner of four properties, two in Saint Andrew's parish, and two in Saint Peter's and Saint Lucy's, the management of which are under my immediate superintendence.

Qu. 2. What is the condition and treatment of the Slaves on the Plantations under your direction, in respect to food, clothing, general comforts, labour and punishments? Is the cart-whip or cow's-skin whip in general used as an instrument of punishment, and is it customary to expose the female Slaves indecently when subjected to punishment?

Ans. The people under my charge have two dressed meals every day. Warm tea in the morning, and from three to four pounds of raw food, in addition to the dressed meals, besides salt-fish and molasses. On my Scotland estate*, where there is more moisture, I allow every adult a petticoat and bed-gown of Pennistone, in addition [p. 103] to the Oznaburgs. The children are allowed one suit annually, and wherever I perceive an individual in a ragged style, whether adult or infant, I give an additional suit. Each family has a small cottage provided at the expense of the estate. The Hospital is provided with bed, blankets, and sheets, attended daily by a medical practitioner, without whose sanction no person is allowed to quit the Hospital. I allow no thonged whip to be used even as a symbol of authority; whatever punishment is inflicted, is inflicted by a small cat with about five strands. I never allow the Superintendent, commonly called Drivers, to apply more than three stripes for any one offence, and though it rarely happens that any mark is made on the persons of the Negroes, I have invariably punished the Driver whenever I have perceived it. Females are punished over the shoulders only, and except for very heinous offences, I have never suffered even the jacket to be removed: wherever confinement in a wholesome room could be

effected, I have always preferred it, but to this there is an objection, arising occasionally from the large families of females, which would suffer from the confinement of the mother.

[p. 104] *Qu.* 3. From your knowledge of the habits of Negroes; are you prepared to say whether or not the women get husbands at an early age, and can you undertake to assert with confidence, whether or not they are restrained from contracting engagements of this kind, by their licentious intercourse with the white men on the estates?

Ans. Most of my young women have husbands at a very early period; whenever I have discovered any attempts on the part of the white servants to form connexions with the females of the estate, I have invariably discharged them; and I have pleasure in stating this fact, that in a population of 525 Slaves, I have not a single child the offspring of a white man, since the estates have been in my possession. I took possession of my first estate in the year 1811.

Qu. 4. What are your opinions respecting the religious instruction of the Slaves by Clergymen of the Established Church?

Ans. The Reverend Mr. Harte, the Rector of Saint Lucy's parish, has lately undertaken to give religious instruction to the Slave population of his parish, and I have from the commencement given him every encouragement and support, by giving my people every Saturday afternoon; and sending [p. 105] them to Church, and occasionally attending myself, together with my family.

These Answers are intended to apply equally to the estate of Sir H. Fitzherbert, which is confided to my care.

(Signed) R. A. ALLEYNE.

* Note: the 'Scotland' estate refers to the Scotland district, St Andrew rather than to the name of a particular plantation.