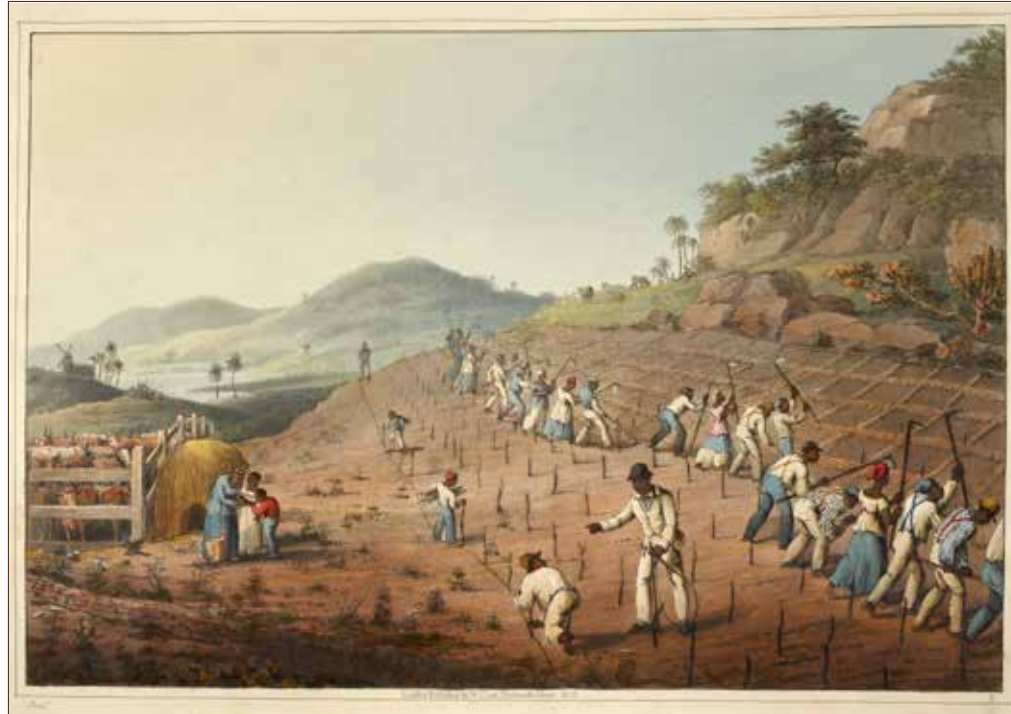


LEGACIES OF BRITISH SLAVE-OWNERSHIP

Plantation life

Enslaved people were employed in many different activities in the New World, but the major crops they produced were coffee, cotton and above all sugar. The process of planting, manuring and cutting the sugar cane was especially arduous and became completely reliant on slave labour.



'Digging the cane-holes' from W. Clark, *Ten Views of the Island of Antigua* (1823). Such images were usually idealised; for example, the overseer in the foreground carries a whip but its use is not evident.

LIFE IN THE COLONIES

Homes and families

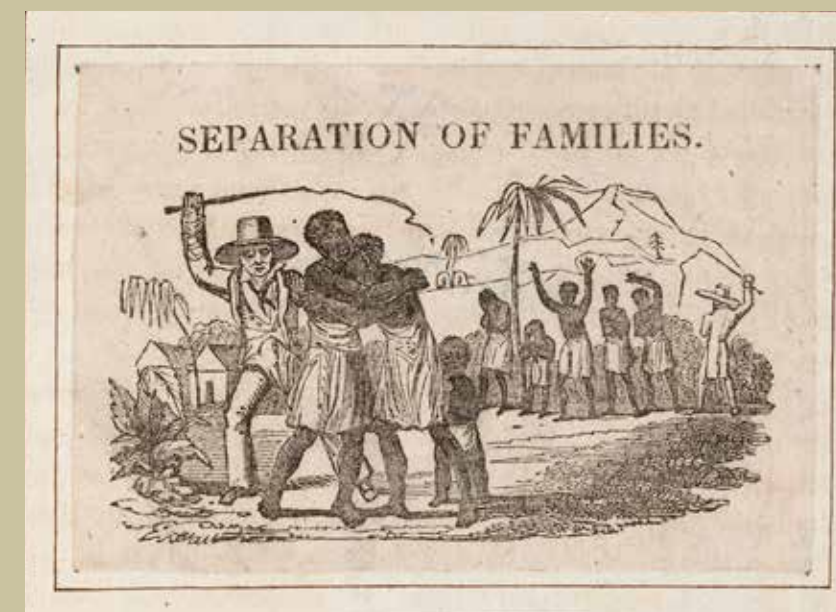


'Negroes Sunday Market at Antigua'.

Slave-owners usually allocated a 'provision ground' to each enslaved person, where they grew food to supplement their basic rations. Sometimes enslaved people could grow surpluses for market, where they could sell goods for their own profit.

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On the plantations, the enslaved people's living quarters became the centre of family life, although slave-owners were able to break up families and separate children from their parents by selling them. Plantations provided the setting for the development of a culture based on African roots and shared new experiences.



Forced separation was used by slave-owners as a means of maximising profits and exerting social control, as illustrated in this print from 1787.

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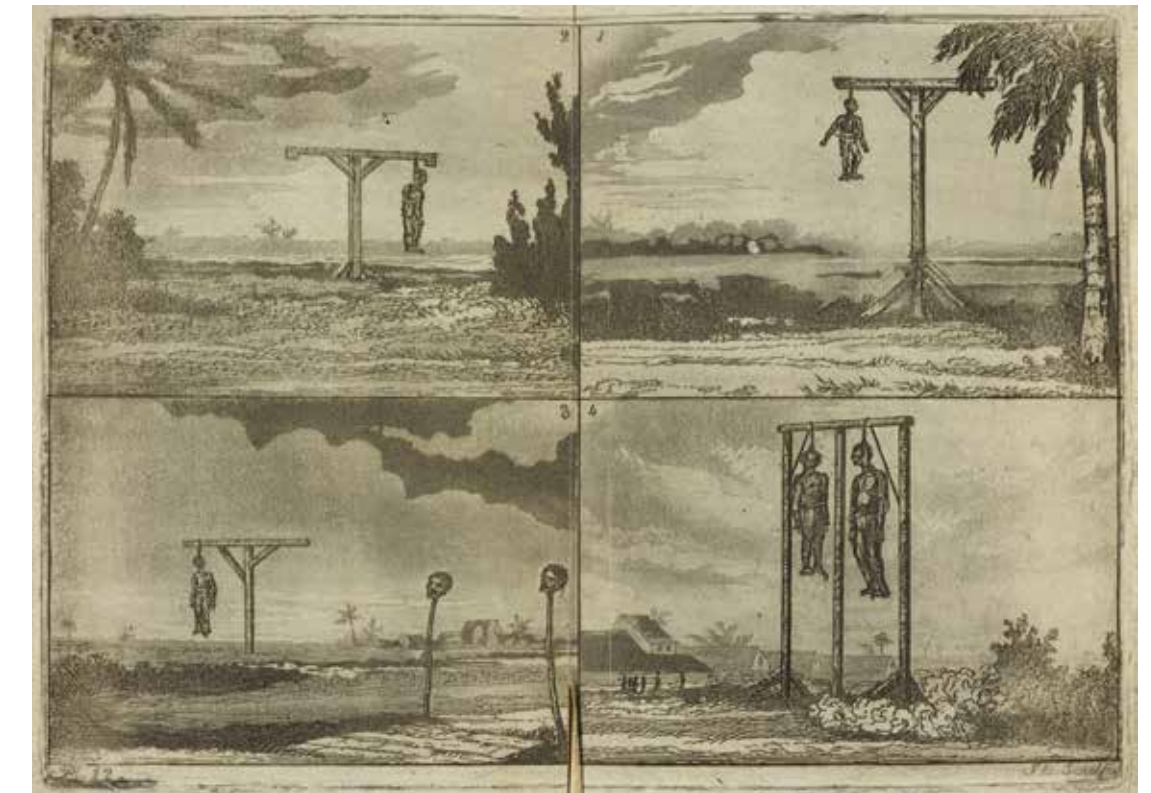
Resistance and revolt

Enslaved people opposed their masters by undertaking countless acts of sabotage and desertion. Everyday resistance involved working as slowly as possible and feigning ineptitude. In some cases, people resisted their enslavement through suicide and infanticide – desperate measures taken to escape from the control of their 'owners'. A subtle and very common form of rebellion was cultural; enslaved people fought to retain their identities and supported each other through preserving their own names, language, music and religious beliefs.



Advertisement in the Royal Gazette offering a reward for the capture of two runaway slaves in Trelawny, Jamaica, in 1780.

Slave-owners lived in constant fear of large-scale slave revolts. Uprisings were frequent with major revolts occurring for example in Jamaica in 1760, Dominica in 1791, Barbados in 1816, Demerara in 1823 and Jamaica in 1831–2, in each of which enslaved people organised to take control of large areas of the colony. Such uprisings were brutally suppressed and the perpetrators faced the death penalty.



Forty-five death sentences were passed following the suppression of the Demerara rebellion of 1823, of which twenty-seven were carried out. Their bodies were displayed in public for months afterwards. Joshua Bryant, *Account of an insurrection of the negro slaves in the colony of Demerara, which broke out on the 18th of August, 1823* (Georgetown, Demerara, 1824), plate 12.



A sugar crushing mill, 1700s.

A sugar estate was a complex agro-industrial site with typically between 100 and 200 enslaved people living and working in conditions which undermined their health, familial relations and life expectancy, and exposed them to violence and sexual exploitation.

Most enslaved people were agricultural workers, some undertook domestic work and others were taught skilled trades such as carpentry or were trained in the complex process of sugar-making.

Museum of London, 2006.44/19