"Gold versus Life:" Jobbing Gangs and the British Caribbean Sugar Economy

In recent years, historians have explored the wide variety of tasks that "hired-out" slaves were forced to perform in the British Americas. Hired slaves in urban or maritime occupations were generally allowed mobility, an escape from plantation labor, along with the chance to earn small sums, at the expense of close-surveillance by capricious whites. These studies have simultaneously noted that the gangs of slaves laboring in the sugar fields of the British Caribbean were themselves frequently slaves to other masters in so-called "jobbing gangs." As an abolitionist explained in 1830, jobbing gangs were groups of slaves who were hired from "a master who is not the owner of the soil" "chiefly…in the laborious process of holing:" digging holes to plant sugar cane—one of the most backbreaking tasks performed by any slave in the Americas. Jobbing gangs emerged in the early eighteenth century so that planters could grow more sugar without increasing their own permanent labor forces. In the second half of the eighteenth century and particularly in the last quarter, many Caribbean planters, spurred by the rising cost of imported slaves, started to rely on jobbing gangs to dig even more of their cane holes. At their height in the thirty before the 1807 abolition of the slave trade, jobbing gangs were a critically important and ubiquitous component of plantation management. By that period, as many as ten percent of the enslaved population of the British Caribbean may have been forced to work in them.[1]

Although scholars know of the existence of jobbing gangs, they have neither fully explored their role in plantation management, nor examined the lives of the tens of thousands of people who

[1] For works that stress opportunities, freedoms and social mobility for slaves who were not confined to a plantation, see for example, Howard Johnson, *The Bahamas from Slavery to Servitude, 1783-1933* (Kingston, 1991), 18-23, 33-46; B.W. Higman, *Slave Populations of the British Caribbean, 1807-1834,* Revised edition (Mona, 1995), 203-4, 226-259; Jeffrey W. Bolster. *Black Jacks: African American Seamen in the Age of Sail.* (Cambridge, 1997); Heather Cateau, "The New 'Negro' Business: Hiring in the British West Indies, 1750–1810," in Alvin O. Thompson, ed., *In the Shadow of the Plantation: Caribbean History & Legacy* (Kingston, 2002), 100-120; Ira Berlin, *Generations of Captivity: A History of African-American Slaves* (Cambridge, 2003); Pedro L.V. Welch, *Slave Society in the City: Bridgetown, Barbados, 1680–1834* (Oxford, 2003); Marisa J. Fuentes, *Dispossessed Lives: Enslaved Women, Violence and the Archive* (Philadelphia, 2016). James Stephen, *The Slavery of the British West India Colonies Delineated*… (London, 1830), 23 ("a master").

were enslaved within them. Studies of individual sugar plantations have noticed the sometimes-enormous sums that planters paid to jobbing gangs to both increase sugar production and alleviate some of the plantations slaves' work. Mary Turner has suggested that jobbing gangs were, by the late eighteenth century, used so widely that they were "instrumental" in the plantation slaves' "wider struggle to improve their work conditions." By the early nineteenth century, Turner argues, plantation slaves in Jamaica had successfully made it a "custom" for jobbers to do the hardest work of sugar production. B.W. Higman's demographic studies of Caribbean slaves in the same period have hinted at the prevalence of jobbing gangs and touched on some of the ways that the gangs were employed. Viewing the widespread use of jobbing gangs, Heather Cateau has suggested that "hiring out was not merely an aberration, but instead must be conceptualized as an important part of the labour system in the British Caribbean." Contracted and wage labor, Cateau concludes, was "evolving within the bowels" of Caribbean slavery, providing an important mechanism for the extraction of labor from both former slaves and indentured workers after emancipation. Although this small corpus of works has sketched the importance of jobbing gangs to the economic history of the Caribbean, they remain an overlooked phenomenon, especially compared to the large sugar plantations that have commanded scholars' attention. Work on jobbing slaves is particularly absent: numerous books and articles have studied sugar plantation slaves; there is not a single sustained study of slaves within jobbing gangs.[2]

[2] For studies of sugar plantations that discuss jobbing gangs, see, Ulrich B. Phillips, "A Jamaica Slave Plantation," *American Historical Review,* 19:3 (Apr., 1914): 543-558; Mary Turner, "Slave Workers, Subsistence and Labour Bargaining: Amity Hall, Jamaica, 1805-1832," in Ira Berlin and Philip D. Morgan, eds., *The Slaves' Economy: Independent Production by Slaves in the Americas* (London, 1995), 92-106; Mary Turner, "Chattel Slaves into Wage Slaves: A Jamaican Case Study," in Mary Turner, ed., *From Chattel Slaves to Wage Slaves: The Dynamics of Labour Bargaining in the Americas* (London, 1995), 33-47; Richard S. Dunn, *A Tale of Two Plantations: Slave Life and Labor in Jamaica and Virginia* (Cambridge, MA, 2014), 134-8, 154. B.W. Higman, *Slave Population and Economy in Jamaica, 1807-1834,* 2nd ed. (Mona, 1995), 11-27; Higman, *Slave Populations,* 47, 54, 164. See also, Higman, "Patterns of Exchange within a Plantation Economy: Jamaica at the Time of Emancipation," Roderick A. McDonald, ed., *West Indies Accounts: Essays on the History of the British Caribbean and the Atlantic Economy in Honour of Richard Sheridan* (Kingston, 1996), 222-224. Heather Cateau, "Re-examining the labour matrix in the British Caribbean 1750 to 1850," in Catherine Hall, Nick Draper, and Keith McClelland, eds., *Emancipation and the Remaking of the British Imperial World* (Manchester, 2013): 98-112. See also, Cateau, "New 'Negro' Business;" Johnson, *Bahamas*, 42.

Jobbing gangs have been largely overlooked because the records describing them are fragmentary. No owner of a jobbing gang (known contemporarily as a "jobber") has left papers that describe their business. Neither do we have firsthand testimony from any of the tens of thousands of people—most of them Africans—who jobbers enslaved. Jobbing gangs appear instead across numerous archives: brief remarks in planters' correspondence; expense lines in account books; newspaper advertisements; and the testimony of abolitionists and planters before Parliament. Although jobbing gangs could be found in almost every British Caribbean sugar colony, the sources describing them are also concentrated heavily in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Jamaica. To describe the emergence, growth, operation, and eventual decline of jobbing gangs historians must piece together these myriad fragments while simultaneously reading planter's papers against the grain to recover the experiences of enslaved people.

Reconstructing the history of jobbing gangs demonstrates that Caribbean slavery was an insidiously adaptable institution that assumed many forms to meet both specific economic demands and changing visions of the master-slave relationship. The prevalence of jobbing gangs by the late eighteenth century provided a pool of specialized enslaved laborers who could be called upon to resolve inefficiencies in sugar production that came with a largely fixed population of plantation slaves and varying seasonal labor demands. Planters could choose to treat hired slaves as an operating expense to preserve their capital stock the terrible toll that holing took on the bodies of sugar workers—and still receive large crops and revenues. The dual systems of permanent and temporary labor, jobbing gangs and permanent plantation slaves, combined with other innovations to perhaps double plantation productivity per slave throughout the British Caribbean between 1700 and 1790; these productivity gains per slave were particularly strong after 1770—the very period when planters

began to rely most heavily on jobbing gangs.[3] Exploring the function of jobbing gangs therefore reveals how slavery, violence, productivity, and economic progress were deeply wedded in ways that historians of capitalism are increasingly finding through numerous studies of slave economies throughout the Americas. These scholars argue that planters were ruthlessly self-interested capitalists focused on extracting ever more labor from their own slaves; yet, these planters also slaves as both laborers and capital investments. Jobbing gangs enhance our narrative of the role of slavery in capitalist development by showing how planters could innovate in economically rational ways by *alleviating*, rather than *increasing*, their own slaves' labor, but still achieve increased productivity. Historians of capitalism have made an important contribution by questioning naturalizing assumptions about the inevitable emergence of wage labor systems.[4] Whereas Cateau and others saw slave hiring as a form of proto-wage labor and a seemingly inevitable step in a transition towards the post-emancipation world, exploring the functioning of jobbing gangs exposes hiring out as a hybrid system of slavery and

[3] For the argument that British Caribbean plantation productivity "possibly doubled" between 1700 and 1790, see David Eltis, Frank D. Lewis and David Richardson, "Slave Prices, the African Slave Trade, and Productivity," *The Economic History Reviewv* 58:4 (Nov, 2005): 694. For Ward's assessment that these productivity gains were most rapid from the 1770s until abolition, see Ward, *British West Indian Slavery: The Process of Amelioration*, *1750-1834* (New York, 1988), 190-198. Ward argues that some of the productivity gains were due to the improved physical health and diet of the enslaved. There were many innovations that contributed to these productivity increases such as changes in processing equipment, changes in accounting practices and the development of more drought resistant varieties of sugar cane; see Justin Roberts, *Slavery and the Enlightenment, 1750-1807* (New York, 2013), 26-79; Veront Satchell, 'Technology and Productivity Change in the Jamaican Sugar Industry, 1760-1830' (Unpublished PhD diss.: University of the West Indies, Mona, 1994); Trevor Burnard, *Planters, Merchants, and Slaves: Plantation Societies in British America, 1650-1820* (Chicago, 2015), 189; Ahmed Reid, "Sugar, Slavery and Productivity in Jamaica, 1750-1807," *Slavery & Abolition* 37:1 (2016): 159-182.

[4] For recent works that have explored the links between slavery and capitalism, see, Seth Rockman, "The Unfree Origins of American Capitalism," in Cathy Matson, *The Economy of Early America: Historical Perspectives & New Directions* (University Park, 2006): 335-362; Walter Johnson, *Soul By Soul: Life Inside the Antebellum Slave Market* (Cambridge, 1999); Caitlyn Rosenthal, "From Memory to Mastery: Accounting for Control in America," *Enterprise and Society*, (December 2013): 732-748, and "Slavery's Scientific Management: Accounting for Mastery," in Sven Beckert and Seth Rockman, eds., *Slavery's Capitalism: A New History of American Economic Development* (Philadelphia, 2016): 62-86; Sven Beckert, *Empire of Cotton: A Global History* (New York, 2014); Calvin Schermerhorn, *The Business of Slavery and the Rise of American Capitalism* (New Haven, 2015); Daina Ramey Berry, *The Price for their Pound of Flesh: The Value of the Enslaved from Womb to Grave, in the Building of a Nation* (Boston, 2017). For the link between violence and productivity, see, Edward Baptist, "Toward a Political Economy of Slave Labor: Hands, Whipping-Machines, and Modern Power," in Beckert and Rockman, eds., *Slavery's Capitalism*, 31-61; Walter Johnson, *River of Dark Dreams: Slavery and Empire in the Cotton Kingdom* (Cambridge, 2013), 248). For West Indian planters' exploitative nature, see for example, Richard S. Dunn, *Sugar and Slaves: The Rise of the Planter Class in the English West Indies, 1624-1713* (Chapel Hill, 1972); Trevor Burnard, *Mastery, Tyranny, and Desire: Thomas Thistlewood and His Slaves in the Anglo-Jamaican World* (Chapel Hill, 2004); Matthew Parker, *The Sugar Barons: Family, Corruption, Empire, and War in the West Indies* (London, 2011); Trevor Burnard and John Garrigus, *The Plantation Machine: Atlantic Capitalism in French Saint-Domingue and British Jamaica* (Philadelphia, 2016).

free labor that did not necessarily have to disappear or evolve into free labor. Jobbing gangs untethered land and labor and created a reserve pool of laborers but they maintained draconian forms of coercion and the extreme exploitation of bondage to compel production. It was a labor system that complimented plantation production and investment strategies and it worked efficiently and brutally until Emancipation.[5]

Examining jobbers and the Africans who they enslaved demonstrates the ways that the planters' self-interested attempts to alleviate the burdens of their slaves created one of the most ruthlessly exploitative forms of slavery in the Atlantic World. Demand for hired labor, coupled with the supply of captive Africans through the slave trade, enabled ambitious whites to purchase slaves. Jobbers were usually from a lower socio-economic class than planters and they sought to elevate themselves by buying captives, working them violently and incessantly, and then using their profits to purchase more slaves. The enormous sums to be earned by hiring captives out enabled landless whites to access the fabled profits of Caribbean slavery and join the plantocracy, accelerating social mobility in the islands. The labor of Africans enslaved in jobbing gangs enabled these ambitious men's ascents. Marching long distances, digging cane holes under a tropical sun using nothing but a hoe, and working under the capricious eye of numerous white overseers, slaves in jobbing gangs avoided the confines of a single plantation but not the violence of production. They were forced to do more arduous labors and typically had a worse standard of living than settled plantation slaves, offering evidence of significant inequalities among Caribbean slaves. Slaves in jobbing gangs, one observer wrote in the nineteenth century, "are worked so very much that they did not last long"—a statement that is borne out by examining the often short and miserable lives of jobbing slaves. After considering the

[5] For the importance of jobbing gangs in the transition to wage labor, see, Walter Rodney, "Plantation Society in Guyana," *Review (Fernand Braudel Center)* 4:4 (Spring, 1981): 648; Michael Craton, "Reshuffling the Pack: The Transition from Slavery to Other Forms of Labor in the British Caribbean, ca. 1790-1890," 68:1/2 (1994): 23-75; Cateau, "Re-examining the labour matrix;" Natasha Lightfoot, *Troubling Freedom: Antigua and the Aftermath of British Emancipation* (Chapel Hill, 2015).

"fortunes" that were built on the graves of these slaves, the same author succinctly summed up the ruthlessly capitalistic attitudes of the jobbers: "it is gold versus life."[6]

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Jobbing gangs emerged in the early eighteenth century, born of the environmental devastation that attended the intensive methods of sugar production pioneered by Barbadian planters. In the mid- and late- seventeenth century, Barbadian planters felled forests to open new lands for cane cultivation, causing widespread soil erosion and depletion. To combat these environmental challenges, Barbadians, who had been planting canes in small holes and then long trenches, developed a new system for planting that they called "deep holing." Enslaved people had to mark out a grid of squares, each measuring approximately three by three feet using twine and wooden pegs, before digging a series of six-inch-deep holes with banks around them (Figure 1). Larger quantities of manure could be placed in the holes to combat the depletion of the soil's fertility and the banks prevented water and soil from running into the sea. Although it is difficult to date the emergence of this new deep holing system precisely, it was certainly in use in Barbados by 1679 when planter Henry Drax instructed his manager to have his slaves dig "Large and deepe holes" to plant canes. The new holing technique made its way to the other British Caribbean islands as the sugar frontier expanded out of Barbados during the late seventeenth century and, by the second half of the eighteenth century, deep holing was the predominant form of planting canes in the British Caribbean.[7]

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[6] Reverend John Riland, *Memoirs of a West Indian Planter Published from an Original MS with Preface and Additional Details* (London, 1827), 208 ("worked," "fortunes," "it is"). For inequalities in standards of living among Caribbean slaves, see Justin Roberts, "The 'Better Sort' and The 'Poorer Sort': Wealth Inequalities, Family Formation and the Economy of Energy on British Caribbean Sugar Plantations, 1750-1800," *Slavery & Abolition*, 35:3 (Sept., 2014): 458-473.

[7] For earlier planting techniques, see Richard Ligon, *A True & Exact History of the Island of Barbadoes*…(London, 1657), 87-88; Samuel Clarke, *A True and Faithful Account of the Four Chiefest Plantations of the English in America*… (London, 1670), 80. For the development of the deep holing system, see, David Watts, "Origins of Barbadian Cane Hole Agriculture," *Journal of the Barbados Museum and Historical Society* 32.3 (May, 1968): 143-151. Peter Thompson, "Henry Drax's Instructions on the Management of a Seventeenth-Century Barbadian Plantation," *WMQ* 3rd ser. 86.3 (July 2009), 590 ("Large"). For the spread of deep holing beyond Barbados, see, Edward Long, *The History of Jamaica*... (London, 1774), 1: 435. "Mr. Richard Beckford's Instruction to Messrs. John Cope, Richard Lewing and Robert Mason," April 10, 175, Thomas Thistlewood Papers (hereafter TTP), Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library (hereafter BRBML), Yale University, New Haven, OSB MSS 176, MON31/86; Samuel Martin, *An Essay on Plantership*… 2nd ed. (Antigua, 1750), 20-31; R. Willock, *The Art*

Insert Figure 1 here

Deep holing lent itself to the gang labor system that Barbadian planters also developed and exported to the other British Caribbean islands. Beginning in the mid-seventeenth century, Barbadian planters organized their slaves into gangs according to their age, sex, and health, with each gang assigned to different tasks depending on the laboriousness or complexity of the operation. The division of labor enabled Barbadian planters to increase productivity by forcing their slaves to work in regimented fashion under the close supervision of whip-holding drivers. Slaves in the "first gang," considered the strongest and most capable of all the slaves on the plantation, were picked out specifically to dig cane holes; they were often known as the "holing gang" even though they performed a variety of tasks. The grid pattern of holes resembled an assembly line forcing the holing gang to work in lockstep rather than in what one Jamaican planter called a "straggling and confused manner."[8]

Holing was brutal work done at an exhausting pace. Two different Jamaican planters estimated that a healthy slave should dig approximately one hundred cane holes per day. By that measure, each person daily shifted 273 cubic feet of soil—eleven tons of dirt—using nothing but a heavy iron hoe, which they swung over their head and smashed into the soil.[9] Planters typically holed in the rainiest months of the year between May and November because young canes required ample water and so the slaves frequently dug soil that was muddy or clay-like. On other occasions the ground was baked

of Making Sugar… (London, 1752), 6-7; Gordon Turnbull, *Letters to a Young Planter*… *Written on the Island of Grenada* (London, 1785), 2-10; Clement Caines, *Letters on the Cultivation of the Otahaiete Cane*… (London, 1801), 40-51.

[8] For the development of the integrated plantation and gang labor, see, Burnard, *Planters*, 22-52. John Dovaston, "Agricultura Americana or Improvements in West India Husbandry Considered …," 1774, John Carter Brown Library, Providence, RI, Codex Eng 60, vol. 2, 52 ("straggling").

[9] According to experienced Jamaican-planter Bryan Edwards, an "able" slave was expected to dig "sixty to eighty" holes in a ten-hour workday, or one every eight to ten minutes; on loose, fallow, soils, a slave had to dig twice as many holes. See, *The History, Civil and Commercial, of the British Colonies in the West Indies: In Two Volumes* (London, 1793), 2: 207. A nineteenth-century Jamaican planter offered a calculation for all soils, estimating that each person should dig one hundred holes per day. See, H.T. De La Beche, *Notes on the Present Conditions of the Negroes in Jamaica* (London, 1825), 106. According to Edwards the base of a cane hole was fifteen inches wide, and its top thirty inches on its square sides, dug to a depth of seven inches. That equals 2.73 cubic feet per hole (((15*7 + (((15*7)/2))*30)* 0.00058). A hundred holes are consequently 273 cubic feet, each cubic foot of which weighs approximately eighty pounds, equaling 21,840lb., or eleven tons. For the heavy hoe used in holing, see, Chris Evans, "The Plantation Hoe: The Rise and Fall of an Atlantic Commodity, 1650–1850" *WMQ* 69. 1 (January 2012): 71-100.

so "hard a Hoe would not enter it;" one planter described the richest soils as having the "hardness of a brick." The holing season was also the hottest of the year, with temperatures soaring to over a hundred degrees in the open fields. But enslaved people could not rest: a driver beat anyone who fell behind. Slaves had to return to the fields day after day. A gang of fifty people could hole between one and a half and two acres a day, and each cane field was as large as twenty acres; planters typically had multiple pieces holed in a season. Indeed, digging cane holes required more working days of labor on sugar plantations than any single task in the planting cycle.[10]

Holing murdered enslaved people, something that contemporaries understood well. Absentee Jamaican planter William Vassal called holing "the hardest work done on an Estate" which caused more "fevers, dysentries & sores, than from any other causes I know of." Barbadian William Dickson likewise believed that holing was "a very laborious" task that caused "colds, fevers and ruptures." And Jamaican planter Edward Long explained that there was "no other work on a plantation…so severe and so detrimental to [the slaves] as that of holing." Demographic evidence supports these eyewitnesses' assertions. The annual attrition rate of British Caribbean slave populations was always disastrous, but the mortality rates on sugar plantation were much worse than for other staple crops. Studies of seasonal mortality and morbidity rates on British Caribbean sugar plantations show that both were highest from October through January—during and immediately after the holing season. Free whites in these islands do not appear to have had increased mortality rates in these months,

[10] Samuel Martin, *An Essay Upon Plantership*…, 4th ed. (London, 1765), 3 ("hard"); Gilbert Farquhar Mathison, *Notices Respecting Jamaica, in 1808, 1809, 1810* (London, 1811), 37 ("hardness"). For holing, see also, James Stephen, *The Crisis of the Sugar Colonies*… (London, 1802), 10; William Dickson, *Letters on Slavery*… (London, 1789), 22-3. For daily acreage, see Edwards, *The History Civil and Commercial*… 2: 207; James Ramsay, *An Essay on the Treatment and Conversion of African Slaves in the British Sugar Colonies* (London, 1784), 119; Anon., *Minutes of the Society for the Improvement of Plantership in the Island of Barbados* (Liverpool, 1811), 12; Caines, *Letters* (London, 1801), 246. For the days of labor in holing, see, Roberts, *Slavery and the Enlightenment*, 107. One witness before Parliament noted that in some holing gangs the "weakly" slaves fell behind the pace when the "abler" slaves "work[ed] forward." In such circumstances, "the weakly Negro seldom fails of being severely flogged up by the driver, and considered as worthless" "hurr[ying]" the person "to their grave." See, Testimony of William Fitzmaurice in Sheila Lambert ed., *House of Commons Sessional Papers of the Eighteenth Century* (Wilmington, Del., 1975), 82: 219 (hereafter *HCSP*).

suggesting that mosquitos and the rain cannot have been the only factors. A smaller sample of 391 deaths on sugar plantations from 1779 until 1798 for which sex could be determined shows that women—who were typically comprised the majority in the holing gang—were three time more likely to die in October, the season for holing, than in May, when they were finishing the harvest. The skeletal remains of slaves at the Barbadian Newton sugar plantation show arthritic knees, elbows, wrists and vertebrae, the kinds of injuries that one would expect from the heavy labor of holing. Well might jobbing gang owner James Grainger describe holing as "A task how arduous!"[11]

Planters began renting jobbing gangs to keep their own slaves from performing this murderous work soon after they transitioned to the new cane holing system. The gangs are first mentioned in 1708 when a "Mr Arnol" in Barbados "did send thirty negroes for two dayes to help to hole a piece of ground," although they may have appeared at an even earlier date. The demand for jobbing gangs seems to have exceeded the supply by mid-century in Barbados. At the Codrington plantation in Barbados, the attorneys complained in 1748 that they were trying to "do the work" that "cannot be performed by those belonging to the plantation" but the "demand for Negroe-hire in the country" made slaves scarce. The annual accounts from the Barbadian Lowther plantation show that in 1756 the managers were relying heavily on jobbing gangs to hole, amounting to seven percent of all plantation expenditures that year. Jobbing gangs had spread beyond Barbados by the same period. An

[11] William Vassal to John Wedderburn, Boston, [1778?] in *The Vassal Letter Books, 1769-1800* (Wakefield, 1963) (hereafter *VLB*) ("the hardest"). William Dickson, *Mitigation of Slavery in Two Parts* (London, 1814), 164 ("a very"). Long, *History,* 1: 448 ("no other"). A Barbadian doctor traced the "diseaes of debility" to holing in 1812, and a Jamaican planter described cane holing in the same period as "fearfully severe" (Quoted in Higman, *Slave Populations of the British Caribbean*, 163). For demographic decline in Caribbean slave populations, see, Eltis, Lewis and Richardson, "Slave Prices," 690; Michael Tadman, The Demographic Cost of Sugar: Debates on Slave Societies and Natural Increase in the Americas," *American Historical Review* 105.5 (December, 2000): 1534-1575. For seasonal mortality and sickness rates, see Ward, *British West Indian Slavery*, 150-151 and Roberts, *Slavery and the Enlightenment*, 171-178. For gendered mortality rates, see, Amanda Thornton, "Coerced Care: Thomas Thistlewood's Account of Medical Practice on Enslaved Populations in Colonial Jamaica, 1751-1786," *Slavery & Abolition* 32:4 (December, 2011): 535-559. Kristrina Shuler, "Health, History, and Sugar: A Bioarcheaological Study of Enslaved Africans from Newton Plantation, Barbados, West Indies" (Unpublished PhD Dissertation: Southern Illinois University Carbondale, 2005), 301-304, 309. James Grainger, *The Sugar-Cane: A Poem in Four Books* (London, 1764), 1: 21 ("A task"). For Grainger's jobbing gang, see, John Gilmore, *The Poetics of Empire: A Study of James Grainger's The Sugar Cane* (London, 1999), 17.

Antiguan wrote in 1742 that he had "hired ye holing of 24 acres." By 1754 at the very latest, jobbing gangs were available for hire in Jamaica. The number of jobbing gangs exploded in the mid-1760s when, according to the Jamaica's agent, a plunge in the price of coffee obliged coffee planters to "let out their working Negroes upon Job Work, on the Sugar Estates;" in 1769, one Jamaican attorney told an absentee that "every other Estate" in the parish "hire jobbing Negroes." By the 1780s, jobbing gangs—or "task work gangs" as they were often labelled in the eastern Caribbean—could be found in every sugar island except Nevis, where planters persisted with the older method of trenching to plant sugar.[12]

The availability and hiring price of jobbing gangs "varied exceedingly in the different islands,", according to Barbadian William Dickson. The biggest differences were between the longer-settled sugar islands in the eastern Caribbean and the areas in which there was a more rapid expansion of sugar, such as Jamaica and the Ceded Islands, which Britain acquired from France in 1763. As ambitious jobbers moved their slaves to the newer sugar frontiers, the gangs become more difficult to find in the older settled islands. For example, the manager of Parham, one of the largest sugar plantations in Antigua, wrote in 1771 to encourage the absentee owner to "augment" his labor force with Africans because it was "not easy to get Negro's for hire as formerly." He explained that "most

[12] Quoted in Watts, "Origins," 149 ("Mr Arnol"). Codrington Attornies to Society for the Propagation of the Gospel (hereafter SPG), June 20, 1748, Correspondence of Attorneys, Codrington Papers, C/COD/35 in *West Indies records of the United Society for the Propagation of the Gospel c.1710-1908: in the U.S.P.G. London* (East Ardsley, 1984) (hereafter CP) ("do the"). For the scarcity of hired slaves in Barbados, see also, William Belgrove, *A treatise upon husbandry or planting*… (Boston, 1755), 9. Lowthers Plantation Annual Financial Abstract, 1756, Papers of the Duke of Cleveland, British Library, MSS 43507. Walter Tullideph to Governor Thomas, Antigua, August 18, 1742, in Richard B. Sheridan, "Letters from a Sugar Plantation in Antigua, 1739-1758," *Agricultural History* 31.3 (July 1957), 7 ("hired ye"). For jobbing gangs in Jamaica, see, Mr. Richard Beckford's Instruction to Messrs. John Cope, Richard Lewing and Robert Mason," April 10, 1754, TTP, BRBML, MON31/86, where Beckford empowered his manager to "hire Negroes" to "fall & plant" forty acres of his plantation. Simon Taylor to Chaloner Arcedeckne, Kingston, Jan. 27, 1769 in in Betty Wood, ed., "The Letters of Simon Taylor of Jamaica to Chaloner Arcedekne, 1765–1775," in *Travel, Trade and Power in the Atlantic, 1765–1884, Camden Miscellany XXXV, Camden 5th Series*, eds. Wood and Martin Lynee (Cambridge, 2002), 71 ("every"). For the prevalence of jobbing gangs throughout the British Caribbean in the 1780s, see the islands' numerous responses to Parliament's question "Are many Negroes usually let out to hire, in what Numbers, and on what Conditions?" in *Report of the Lords of the Committee of Council appointed for the Consideration of all Matters relating to Trade and Foreign Plantations.* . . . ([London?], 1789), 210 ("let"), 284, 290, 332, 350, 357, 368, 406, 427. For jobbing gangs in Demerara, see, *Essequebo and Demerary Gazette* (Georgetown, Demerara), January 28, 1804.

of the people that had task work Gangs, have now got Land at one or other of the near Islands, and have sent their Negro's to settle them." By the early nineteenth century, planters in Jamaica and Grenada still paid nearly twice as much for jobbing gangs to hole land as the planters paid in Barbados or Saint Kitts, suggesting that the disproportionate demand for hired labor in the sugar frontiers persisted. The jobbers in Barbados, in particular, had "considerable gangs of Slaves" and not enough land to work them on so they hired them out to sugar planters at low rates. Barbados was unique in that it was the only sugar island that became self-reproducing before abolition and so the planters there faced less chronic labor shortages than islands such as Jamaica. Yet, Barbadian planters still chose to hire jobbing gangs to both increase production and preserve their own slaves' bodies. While distributed unevenly, jobbing gangs could be found throughout the British Caribbean by the second half of the eighteenth century.[13]

The numbers of jobbing gangs grew at the end of the eighteenth century as both the sugar frontier and the trans-Atlantic slave trade expanded in tandem. Henry Coor, who had been a millwright in Jamaica for fifteen years, told a parliamentary committee that "[j]obbing gangs were increasing much" when he left the island in 1774. Numerous sources indicate that jobbing gangs did play a larger role in plantation management in the late eighteenth century. On the Mesopotamia Jamaican sugar plantation, the amounts spent on jobbers rose from £100 sterling a year in 1751-1777, to £157 in 1777-1788, and £293 by 1798-1808—in the first period, the managers spent half as much on jobbers as they did on captive Africans. Vassal had a third of his cane holes planted by jobbers in the fall of 1773 because he did not want to "overwork" his slaves. At the Barbadian Turner's Hall estate, in 1779, the amount spent on getting jobbing gangs to hole rose to as high as twenty percent

[13] For differences between the older and newer sugar islands and the high prices paid in Jamaica, see Dickson, *Mitigation* (1814), 262-263, 262 ("varied") ("considerable"). For the different demand for jobbing gangs within Jamaica, see Higman, "Patterns of Exchange," 222. The Parham attorney also recommended that the overseers be paid more or they would be lured away by prospects in the "new islands." See Francis Farley to Clement Tudway, Antigua, March 5, 1771, Correspondence from Antigua, 1767-1783, D01, Tudway of Wells Papers (hereafter TWP), Somerset Record Office (hereafter SRO) ("augment").

of all plantation expenses; it appears that nearly all the holes on the plantation were dug by jobbing gangs that year. In 1782, experienced Jamaican attorney Simon Taylor wrote that just under half of the 114 acres of "hard Clay Ground" on the massive Golden Grove sugar estate would be put in by a jobbing gang because the plantation's slaves could not do it without "hurting them." Taylor believed that jobbing gangs should be hired annually to dig half of the holes and prevent the plantation's slaves from being "pushed on to do more than they are able." Jobbing became such a critical element in the sugar production cycle that "[a]lmost every man in Jamaica," planter William Beckford wrote in 1788, was "anxious to call in the aid of hired labour."[14]

Although jobbing gangs were common and growing in number before the abolition of the slave trade, the precise number of slaves in the gangs at any point in time is hard to determine. Jobbing gangs lived on the margins of plantation society; they were not associated with a spot of land and were often invisible in official records. When a Jamaican planter was asked by the House of Lords how many "jobbing Negroes" were in the island, he admitted, "[i]t is impossible for me to even hazard an opinion upon that head." A prominent merchant testified that there were 193,000 slaves reported in the tax rolls in 1774 in Jamaica but "there were at least 10,000 more" because of "jobbers, and others, who did not give in their numbers." Nevertheless, the uniquely detailed 1774 census of Saint James' parish, a sugar growing district in western Jamaica, does give a glimpse of the ubiquity of jobbing gangs in the last quarter of the eighteenth century—likely the height of their use in that plantation economy. There were 616 white men in Saint James' in 1774, who collectively owned 14,522 enslaved people. Of these men, fifty-nine, or just under ten percent were jobbers, and they possessed 2,134

[14] Testimony of Henry Coor in Lambert ed., *HCSP*, 82: 96 ("[j]obbing"). For Mesopotamia, see, Dunn, *Tale,* p.134. William Vassal to John Wedderburn, Boston, August 24, 1773 in *VLB* ("overwork"). For Turner's Hall, see, Annual Abstract of Accounts, 1779, FitzHerbert of Tissington (hereafter FT), Derbyshire Record Office (hereafter DRO), D239/M/E/20689. Simon Taylor to Chaloner Arcedeckne, Kingston, September 9, 1782, Taylor and Vanneck-Arcedeckne Papers (hereafter TVAP), *Plantation Life in the Caribbean Series: Pt. 1, Jamaica, c. 1765–1848* (hereafter PLC), (Marlborough, 2005), Vanneck-Arc/3A/1782/36 ("hard"); Simon Taylor to Haughton?, Kingston, July 24, 1784, TVAP, PLC, Letterbook 1779-1785 ("pushed"). William Beckford, *Remarks Upon the Situation of Negroes in Jamaica*… (London, 1788), 95 ("[a]lmost").

slaves—fifteen percent of all the slaves in the parish. Given that Saint James' was a sugar growing parish recently opened to settlement, a similar proportion of enslaved people may have been employed in jobbing gangs elsewhere in the frontiers of sugar agriculture, such as the Ceded Islands and, after the 1790s, Demerara and Trinidad. Perhaps half as many slaves were employed in jobbing gangs in some of the longer settled areas in the Leeward Islands and Jamaica's southern parishes. A 1788 return from Montserrat, for example, informed Parliament that there were "about 700" slaves in "Task work Gangs," just over eight percent of the island's 8,310 slaves. Barbados, given the "considerable" size of its jobbing gangs might have fallen somewhere between the Leeward Islands and Jamaica. While it is impossible to precisely give Caribbean-wide figures for the number of jobbing slaves, one in ten slaves in the last quarter of the eighteenth century seems a reasonable estimate.[15]

Jobbing gangs proliferated because they allowed planters to grow more sugar with less permanent labor by addressing seasonal inefficiencies in production. The number of enslaved plantation workers was constant throughout the year, but the demands of labor were seasonal and varied by task. Planters determined their permanent labor demands by the number of slaves available to harvest the crop, a more time-sensitive process than holing because the sugar content of canes began to deteriorate as soon as they were cut. Bouts of "night work" were required to complete the fast-paced harvest, one planter noted, but harvesting could be done by slaves who were not strong enough to hole. The work logs from Jamaica's Prospect Estate in 1791 show that during the harvest as many as sixty-six enslaved people cut canes together— all the slaves in the "first gang." Yet, when Prospect's overseers wanted cane holes dug, they always separated the first gang into two groups: one

[15] For the difficulty in determining the precise number of enslaved people in jobbing gangs, see Higman, "Patterns of Exchange," 222. Higman agrees that the demand for jobbing gangs may have been higher in Saint James than in some other parishes. See, Ibid., 224. Testimony of Lewis Cuthbert in *Minutes of the evidence taken at the bar of the House of Lords, upon the order made for taking into consideration the present state of the trade to Africa, and particularly the trade in slaves; ...* (London, 1792), 87 ("jobbing"). Testimony of George Hibbert in Lambert ed., *HCSP*, 72: 394-5 ("there were"). "Settlers in the Parish of Saint James next in degree to sugar planters consisting of Pens, Coffee planters, Jobbers, Millwrights, Carpenters, Masons & suchlike," Edward Long Papers, British Library, Add Ms. 12435. For the number of jobbing slaves in Montserrat, see, *Report of the Lords,* 354, 357.

group dug holes while the rest were assigned lighter tasks, almost certainly the strongest and weakest slaves respectively. William Belgrove's 1755 Barbadian plantation manual explained that one of the tasks of a plantation manager should be to identify "the abelest and best" for "Holeing and the stronger Work" and separate them from the rest. The bottleneck in sugar production was therefore the number of holes that could be dug by these smaller groups of slaves, rather than the number of canes that could be cut. Hiring jobbing gangs removed this bottleneck, increasing the amount of cane that the plantation's own slaves could cut. Many planters also routinely hired jobbers to put in a "Spring Plant" while the plantation's regular slaves were busy cutting cane between January and June, ensuring that more canes were available to cut in the following year; some insisted that they would always have a "Spring Plant" done by jobbing gangs even when they were trying to reduce expenses. Jobbing gangs allowed planters to temporarily increase the capacity of their labor force, just as British farmers might bring in workers to scythe their wheat; two planters even equated jobbing gangs to "English day laborers."[16]

The escalating price of newly arriving African slaves coupled with the planters' ruthless economic self-interest helped make jobbing gangs even more essential to plantation management in the second half of the eighteenth century. The real price of imported slaves nearly doubled between the late 1740s and the late 1780s making enslaved people an increasingly valuable share of the plantation's capital stock. Between 1780 and 1807, the real price of imported slaves increased a further 140 percent; the strongest captives were the most expensive. In the same period, the real price of sugar

[16] For labor demands on sugar plantations, see James Collins, *Practical Rules for the Management and Medical Treatment of Negro Slaves in the Sugar Colonies* (London, 1803) 175-212, 184 ("night work"). Collins estimated that only "one-sixth" of a plantation's slaves would be strong enough for holing. Plantation Journals of the Prospect Sugar Estate (East Ardsley, 2004), 0627-0019. William Belgrove, *A Treatise Upon Husbandry or Planting* (Boston: 1755), 65 ("ablest"). For the spring plant, see for example, Simon Taylor to Chaloner Arcedeckne, Kingston, November 3, 1783, TVAP, PLC, Vanneck-Arc/3A/1783/40; John Stewart, *An Account of Jamaica and Its Inhabitants*… (London, 1808), 111. As Taylor pointed out, the Spring Plant "never can be done by the Estates people as the Mill is then always about" (Simon Taylor to Chaloner Arcedeckne, Millet Hall, September 3, 1787, TVAP, PLC, Vanneck- Arc/3A/1787/14). Mathew Lewis, *Journal of a West-India Proprietor Kept During a Residence in the Island of Jamaica* (London, 1834), 102 ("English"). See also, William Vassal to John Wedderburn, London, June 18, 1784 in *VLB*.

increased by forty percent, largely because the Haitian Revolution destroyed the Saint Domingue sugar industry after 1791. The cost of African slaves was so "extravagantly dear" compared to the price of sugar by 1795 that two absentee Barbadian planters asked their plantation manager if it made sense to lessen the workload for the slaves already on the plantation until they "propagated" on their own because "we woud rather avoid purchasing any Negroes in these times." In an era in which slave prices escalated faster than sugar prices, it made economic sense to hire slaves to dig cane holes—a process that required large numbers of able captives for a short period of time. [17]

As slave prices rose, planters tried to preserve the health, and therefore investment value, of the people they owned by hiring jobbing gangs. Planters conceived of slaves literally as human capital—living tools who would quickly wear out if they were overworked because they were not, as Simon Taylor reminded one absentee planter in 1770, "Steel or iron." Enslaved people were a plantation's "strength," Taylor added, which increased by purchasing new slaves and reduced by their "fall[ing] of[f]" as work wore them down, just as a business' capital assets appreciated and depreciated. Planters thought of the purchase of African slaves as an addition to the capital stock, and not as an operating expense; the purchase of slaves was, as one Jamaican attorney told a sugar planter, "adding to your Capital" which would give "good returns" in the "future." In 1783, the manager of Parham explained how critical the hired jobbing gangs were for preserving the value of the plantation's slaves. "[T]he loss of one good Negroe" from the plantation's own workforce would, he wrote, "amount to much more than the Money paid for holing many Acres of Land" by jobbing gangs. The operating costs of jobbing were worth paying, he explained, because it was "saving the Negroes." As one astute nineteenth-century observer noted, the planters made the jobbing gangs do "the hardest and most

[17] For rising slave prices between 1740 and 1780, see, Eltis, Lewis and Richardson, "Slave Prices:" 679. John Land and Thomas Lane to [William Yard?], 12 September 1795, Newton Papers, Senate House Library, University of London Archives, London, MS523/967 ("propagated"). For the comparative price increases between 1780 and 1807, see Reid, "Sugar, Slavery and Productivity," 163.

disagreeable work" because they wanted to "save their own slaves as much as possible from such work."[18]

From the 1780s onwards, some planters claimed that their economically motived use of jobbing gangs was also morally virtuous because it preserved their slaves' health and encouraged their natural reproduction—key strategies in the era of Amelioration, when metropolitan critics and even some planters argued that slavery could be reformed. For planters the primary metric for the effectiveness of ameliorative management was always, as a Barbadian manager explained in 1798, whether the slave population was "upwardly increasing, a certain sign of Happiness & good treatment."[19] A 1786 Barbadian plantation manual recommended that planters should arrange to have one half of the cane holes dug by jobbing gangs so that the plantation's slaves were "worked moderately and treated kindly," encouraging their natural reproduction. Likewise, a Jamaican agriculturalist writing after emancipation remembered, "as soon as the slaves on the property naturally decreased, jobbing gangs were further employed." Hiring jobbing gangs became a way to signal the adoption of ameliorative management. An Antiguan plantation manager explained in 1783 that he preferred to hire gangs to dig the plantation holes when the plantation slaves "are Sickly, or…weak and low in Flesh," because it saved on labor replacement costs but also because of "the inhumanity

[18] Simon Taylor to Chaloner Arcedeckne, Kingston, February 25, 1770 in Wood, ed., "Letters," 87 ("Steel," "strength"). For similar sentiments, see, Robert Thompson to William D. Shipley, 22 June, 1797, Bodrhyddan Papers, in Clare Taylor, ed., *West Indian Planter Attitudes to the American and French Revolution as Seen in Manuscripts, in the National Library of Wales* (Aberystwyth, 1978), 308-311. Malcolm Laing to William Philip Perrin, Kingston, March 24, 1772, FT, DRO, D239/M/E/16733 ("adding"). For slaves as fixed capital, see also, Robert E. Gallman and Ralph V. Anderson, "Slaves as Fixed Capital: Slave Labor and Southern Economic Development." *Journal of American History* 64.1 (June, 1977): 24-46. Main Swete Walrond to Clement Tudway, 23 April 1783," Correspondence from Antigua, 1767-1783, D01, TWP, SRO ("[T]he loss", "saving"). John Stewart, *A View of the Past and Present State of the Island of Jamaica*… (Edinburgh, 1823), 234 ("the hardest").

[19] Sampson Wood to Thomas Lane, 31 March 1798, Newton Family Papers, Senate House Library, University of London Archives, MS 523/334 ("upwardly"). For emphasis on natural reproduction starting in the 1780s, see Sasha Turner, *Contested Bodies: Pregnancy, Childrearing and Slavery in Jamaica* (Philadelphia, 2017). The most complete work on the era of Amelioration and its economic and social consequences is still Ward, *British West Indian Slavery*. See also, Mary Turner, "Planter Profits and Slave Rewards: Amelioration Reconsidered," *West Indies Accounts: Essays on the History of the British Caribbean and the Atlantic Economy in Honour of Richard Sheridan* (Kingston, 1996): 232-252; Christa Dierksheide, *Amelioration and Empire: Progress and Slavery in the Plantation Americas* (Charlottesville, 2014); Roberts, *Slavery and the Enlightenment*, 60-61; J.R. Ward, "The Amelioration of British West Indian Slavery: Anthropometric Evidence," *Economic History Review* 00:0 (2018): 1-28.

of severely working the Slaves when they are in distress." In 1823, the Reverend Thomas Cooper gave Jamaican planter George Hibbert "the fullest credit for humanity and generosity" towards his slaves, explaining as his evidence that the slave's on Hibbert's plantation "were often eased in their labour by the assistance of a jobbing gang." From the 1780s through Emancipation jobbing gangs thus gained a new purpose: they became ideological tools that could be used to demonstrate ameliorative management to absentee planters. Meanwhile, the "ignorant" and "cruel" owners of jobbing gangs, as one Jamaican-born sugar planter scornfully described them, became a convenient scape goat for the miseries of Caribbean slavery.[20]

When jobbing gangs became too expensive or difficult to hire, the planters quickly dispensed with such supposedly humane management techniques. Patrick Kein, former planter and author of a 1796 plantation management manual, warned his readers that the cost of hiring gangs for holing was "very great indeed" because their owners charged premium rates. Hired gangs could be difficult to find immediately and the wait could hinder the precise timing necessary to maximize production on a sugar plantation. [21] At Turner's Hall, in 1757, for example, the plantation manager wanted more

[20] Edwin Lascelles et al., *Instructions for the Management of a Plantation in Barbadoes. And for the Treatment of Negroes, etc., etc., etc.* (London, 1786), 2 ("worked"), 6. W.F. Whitehouse., *Agricola's Letters and Essays on Sugar-Farming in Jamaica* (Kingston, 1845), 226 ("as soon"). Main Swete Walrond to Clement Tudway, 23 April 1783," Correspondence from Antigua, 1767-1783, TWP, SRO, D01 ("are Sickly"). Thomas Cooper and George Hibbert, *Correspondence between George Hibbert, Esq. and the Rev. T. Cooper: Relative to the Condition of the Negro Slaves in Jamaica…* (London, 1824), 7-8 ("the fullest"). Robert Charles. Dallas, *A Short Journey in the West Indies* (London, 1790) 2: 5 ("ignorant"). At least one planter believed that his use of jobbing gangs would forestall rebellions among his slaves. The manager of Nathaniel Phillips' Jamaican plantations explained to him in 1792 that the slaves in the nearby mountains "were mutinous" but he assured Phillips that his own slaves were doing "their duty with cheerfulness" because "[t]hey have not been pressed too much in holing last year," having contracted to have new canes on both plantations put in by a jobbing gang. See, Thomas Barritt to Nathaniel Phillips, Saint Thomas in the East, February 8, 1792, *Jamaican Material in the Slebech Papers,* British Records Relating to America in Microform (Wakefield, U.K., 2004), 8388.

[21] For the expense of holing and the premiums paid, see Roberts, *Slavery and the Enlightenment*, 149-150; Patrick Kein, *An Essay Upon Pen-Keeping and Plantership* (Kingston, 1796), 85 ("very great"). Jobbing gangs cost twice as much as an equivalent team of day laboring slaves hired as individuals. Presumably planters paid premiums to cover the cost of the detrimental effects of holing on the health of the slaves in the jobbing gangs; the specialization of the jobbing slaves; and the logistics of forming a jobbing gang. Like the free labor market, the availability of jobbing gangs did create some labor uncertainties for planters. The attorneys for the SPG complained about "the Precarious Dependency on hired labour" on the Society's two Barbadian estates because with hired slaves "it is almost always a Contingency, whether they can be hired or not" (July 10, 1760, Correspondence from Attorneys, 1760-1770, CP, C/WI/COD/39). The uncertainty was not necessarily as potentially disruptive to plantation production as that for European farmers seeking wage labor to harvest crops. For the

permanent slaves on the estate and he complained that relying too much on hired slaves created "a very uncertain dependence." Experienced plantation managers saw the over reliance on jobbing gangs as a potential road to ruin because the cost of hiring devoured profits without adding to capital. When they calculated whether to hire labor, planters carefully weighed the capital cost of buying new slaves against the expenses of jobbing gangs, while simultaneously predicting the price of sugar and the amount of holing their own slaves could bear. In 1783, for example, Simon Taylor urged the owner of Golden Grove to purchase slaves to reduce the enormous expense of jobbing which had led to the planting of overly large crops. "[I]t is only ruin to throw away money to plant land" merely for the sake of having large crops, Taylor wrote. Later in the same year Taylor informed Golden Grove's owner that he would purchase thirty enslaved women from Africa and then there "never will again be a Stroke of Jobbing on the Estate, except for a Spring plant." To Taylor—one of the leading managers of sugar plantations in the British Caribbean—jobbing gangs should only be employed to do what was "absolutely necessary:" preventing a plantation's slaves from being "pushed on to do more than they are able more especially in holing land." There were always limits to the extent to which planters would hire jobbing gangs to spare their own slaves, and those limits were almost always connected to their profits.[22]

The closing of the trans-Atlantic slave trade in 1807 marked the beginning of the end for jobbing gangs because it raised the demand for hired labor while simultaneously halting the supply of captive Africans workers. When journalists Joseph Sturge and Thomas Harvey toured the Caribbean

most part, sugar planters were worried that they could not get enough slaves to maximize production by planting a sufficient number of fields with canes.

[22] Samuel Rollstone to William Fitzherbert, Newton, July 9, 1757, FT, DRO, D239/M/E/20512 ("very uncertain"). Simon Taylor to Chaloner Arcedeckne, Kingston, June 1, 1783, TVAP, PLC, Vanneck-Arc/3A/1783/19 ("[I]t is"). Simon Taylor to Chaloner Arcedeckne, Kingston, November 3, 1783, TVAP, PLC, Vanneck-Arc/3A/1783/40 ("never will"). Simon Taylor to Haughton?, Kingston, July 24, 1784, TVAP, PLC, Letterbook 1779-1785 ("pushed on"). In 1793, a Jamaican jobber wrote that the "business is now really almost overdone" because the planters were all "stocking their Estates with Negroes," indicating that Taylor was not exceptional in choosing to purchase slaves to lower the cost of jobbing. See, James Renny to John Tailyour, Morant Bay, June 28, 1793, Tailyour Family Papers (hereafter TFP), William Clements Library (hereafter WCL), University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, MI, Box 5.

in 1837 they noted that, before 1834, Jamaican sugar planters were hiring jobbing gangs "to dig the greater part of the cane-holes." Matthew Lewis explained in his 1817 journal that on his large Jamaican sugar plantation "digging holes" for canes was "chiefly performed by extra negroes, hired for the purpose;" in the same period Jamaican planter George Hibbert's "cane-holes were always dug by jobbers." Without access to imported Africans, labor-hungry planters were eventually forced to buy the gangs outright to obtain new workers, leading to a steady decline in the number of slaves employed in jobbing gangs. In his pro-slavery work of 1827, Alexander Barclay wrote that "[m]any of the jobbing gangs" that had been in existence in 1808 had since been "bought up by the plantations." "[S]laves are going out of the hands of the lower classes," he added, "into those of the more wealthy and concentrating on the plantations." B.W. Higman's analysis of compensation records on the eve of abolition in 1832 found that, of the 313,000 slaves in Jamaica, just six percent were employed in jobbing gangs, a clear decline from the pre-abolition era when jobbers probably owned around ten percent of enslaved people in the island. Compensation records demonstrate that jobbing gangs were clearly in existence when slavery was abolished in the British Caribbean two years later. Emancipation dealt the final blow to the deadly business of jobbing: no record explicitly mentions jobbing gangs as being in operation after 1839.[23]

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[23] Joseph Sturge and Thomas Harvey, *The West Indies in 1837: Being the Journal of a Visit to Antigua, Montserrat, Dominica, St. Lucia, Barbadoes and Jamaica*… (London, 1838), 442 ("to dig"). Lewis, *Journal,* 101-2 ("digging"). Cooper and Hibbert, *Correspondence*, 7-8 ("cane-holes"). Barclay estimated that of the 320,000 slaves in Jamaica in 1817, somewhere between "50,000 to 70,000" remained the property of "small settlers, jobbers, mechanics, and persons in towns." See, Alexander Barclay, *A Practical View of the Present State of Slavery in the West Indies*… (London, 1827), 258 ("[m]any" "[S]laves"). Sugar planter Henry De La Beche wrote in 1825 that "Jobbing gangs are…by no means so numerous as they formerly were, the abolition of the slave trade having in great measure prevented overseers and others who had acquired some little money from investing it in this kind of property." See, De La Beche, *Notes*, 34. Higman, *Slave Population,* 16. For the decline of jobbing gangs after 1807, see also, Christer Petley, *Slaveholders in Jamaica: Colonial Society and Culture During the Era of Abolition* (London, 2009), 28-29. See *Legacies of British Slave-ownership* (http://www.ucl.ac.uk/lbs) where six jobbers were compensated for the emancipation of their gangs. According to the managers of *LBS* "There are I'm sure hundreds of owners of jobbing gangs in the records, but there is no way of systematically identifying them" (Personal communique).

Sugar planters' self-interested attempts to preserve the lives of their slaves provided a demand for hired laborers that middling whites met by purchasing Africans and forcing them into jobbing gangs. To the thousands of landless whites who travelled to the Caribbean in the eighteenth century, the ownership of enslaved laborers potentially offered enough wealth to allow social mobility or even a route into the exalted ranks of the plantocracy. There were few other routes to a fortune in the Caribbean for men possessed of little capital. Purchasing an entire plantation was beyond the means of most middling whites. Bookkeepers on plantations, entry level positions for newcomers, were typically paid around £40 sterling per annum, whereas a small Jamaican estate with one hundred slaves cost £10,000 in 1775—250 years of earnings! The purchase and hiring out of slaves was consequently, Jamaican planter-attorney Lewis Cuthbert explained, "the only source" by which non-planter whites could "increase their property in money." Simon Taylor warned the House of Lords in 1792 that abolition would drive whites off the island because "[t]hese people come there with an intent to better their circumstances; what little money they can save out of their salaries, or whatever little credit they can procure, they invest in Negroes." Slave ownership was therefore widespread in the British Caribbean because, as one witness to Parliament pointed out, "every overseer or white man who had money or credit bought new negroes to job them out."[24]

Jobbing gangs were the pinnacle of this wider world of hiring because they were some of the largest groups of slaves in the British Atlantic world. Whereas most middling whites might hire out individuals to perform day labor on plantations or in towns, jobbing gangs, by their nature, comprised large numbers of enslaved laborers working together. The Saint James' census reveals that the smallest jobbing gang comprised twenty-four enslaved people, and the largest, of which there were two, had

[24] For white plantation staff, see, B.W. Higman, *Plantation Jamaica, 1750–1807: Capital and Control in a Colonial Economy* (Mona, 2008) 29-32. For the cost of a plantation, see, Long, *History of Jamaica*, 1: 459-460. Testimony of Lewis Cuthbert in *Minutes of the Evidence*, 77 ("the only"). Testimony of Simon Taylor in *Minutes of the Evidence* ("[t]hese people"). Testimony of Henry Coor in Lambert ed., *HCSP,* 82: 96 ("every").

120 slaves; the median was forty slaves. Jobbing gangs were relatively small compared to the sugar plantations that they serviced, which held approximately two hundred people. But they were extremely large when viewed in the wider context of the British Americas. Tobacco and rice plantations averaged twenty and fifty enslaved workers respectively and the median size for an antebellum U.S. cotton plantation—the quintessential Atlantic slave holding—was thirty-five slaves. Jobbing gangs were large because they needed to accommodate the labor-intensive requirements of digging holes across several acre cane fields; as Cuthbert explained, with less than thirty slaves a jobber "cannot, with his own strength, undertake any job of any consequence."[25]

Given their large size, whites formed jobbing gangs "by degrees" over a several year period, a process that is detailed in the papers of Thomas Thistlewood, overseer on the Egypt Jamaican sugar estate. In 1756, six years after arriving in Jamaica, Thistlewood bought a newly arrived Igbo-speaking boy using a bill of credit and re-named him Lincoln. Thistlewood used the money that he earned from renting Lincoln to Egypt, in combination with his own salary, to draw credit from slave factors and purchase twenty-four other Africans from six different ships between 1758 and 1765; he used his increased borrowing power to acquire progressively larger groups of captives (Table 1). By 1765, Thistlewood had spent £877 on twenty-five Africans, an enormous sum given that he annually earned just £43 as a salary as Egypt's overseer. In the same period, two of his slaves had children, expanding his gang to twenty-seven. Thistlewood rented out most of his captives to perform day-labor on Egypt, but he also had two of the enslaved women trained to sew and launder and then hired them out to whites in a nearby town. Rather than turning his twenty-seven slaves into a jobbing gang, Thistlewood used his accumulated earnings to purchase Breadnut Island in 1767, a 160-acre provisions and

[25] "Settlers in the Parish of Saint James next in degree to sugar planters consisting of Pens, Coffee planters, Jobbers, Millwrights, Carpenters, Masons & suchlike," Edward Long Papers, British Library, Add Ms. 12435. For sugar plantations, see, Long, *History of Jamaica*, 1: 459-460. For tobacco and rice plantations, see, Philip D. Morgan, *Slave Counterpoint: Black Culture in the Eighteenth-Century Chesapeake and Lowcountry* (Chapel Hill, 1998), 40-1. For cotton plantations, see, Robert W. Fogel, *Without Consent or Contract*: *The Rise and Fall of American Slavery* (New York, 1994), 30. Testimony of Lewis Cuthbert in *Minutes of the Evidence*, 109 ("cannot").

livestock pen. Thistlewood's accounts demonstrate, however, that whites who became jobbers first spent much time and money acquiring slaves—seventeen years and £877 in Thistlewood's case. Their captives performed a variety of tasks both on and off plantations for several years before they became a jobbing gang.[26]

Insert Table 1 here

Whites formed their captives into a jobbing gang because they stood to earn large sums through the business. In the second half of the eighteenth century, cane holing was normally done at the rate of approximately £3 per acre in Barbados, £4.5-8 in the Leeward Islands, £7-10 in the Windward Islands, and £6–£7 in Jamaica. These rates were twice those for an equivalent number of individual slaves, accelerating the earnings for those men who acquired enough captives to form a jobbing gang. A range of contemporary estimates suggest that it took approximately thirty-three slaves—a median sized jobbing gang—a day to hole an acre of land in the second half of the eighteenth century. Given that thirty-three slaves cost approximately £990 in the same period (£30 sterling each), a jobber only needed to hole 330 acres in Barbados and 165 acres in Jamaica (approximately sixteen and eight cane pieces respectively) before he had paid off the purchase price of his gang. This calculation does not include expenses such as clothing and food, but even when these items are accounted for, jobbers likely earned substantial profits from their captives. One planter calculated that it only took "three or four years" for a jobber to earn more than the cost of his slaves. And a Jamaican millwright who himself hired out gangs of slaves in the 1760s and 70s estimated that jobbers annually earned fourteen percent per on their capital, returns that exceeded those earned by both sugar planters and slave traders in the same period. The testimony of jobbers confirms that they made large sums.

[26] Thomas Cooper, *Facts Illustrative of the Condition of the Negro Slaves in Jamaica: with Notes and an Appendix* (London, 1824), 62 ("by degrees"). For Thistlewood's gang, see, Table 1. For Thistlewood's salary, see, Diary of Thomas Thistlewood, September 16, 1751, TTP, BRBML, MON31/2. For Thistlewood, see, Burnard, *Mastery, Tyranny*. For the use of credit to acquire slaves to hire out, see also, Charles Ruddach to Charles Stewart, Kingston, April 1, 1784, Jamaica Manuscripts collection, 1774-1950 (hereafter JMC) , Item 17, University of Miami Special Collections (hereafter UM), Gainesville, FL, ASM0320.

Doctor James Blaw, who worked in eastern Jamaica in the 1760s and 70s, told a correspondent that he was making "about" £650 sterling "annually" from his gang of forty-nine slaves; Jamaican overseer Charles Ruddach made "£1,400 sterling" from hiring his much larger gang out in 1793 alone; and John Kelly, the overseer on the Golden Grove Jamaican plantation, turned a profit of "near 1500 p[er] an[um]" from his gang of 140 slaves. These were phenomenal sums for men who made just £30-100 sterling per year as overseers or doctors, and it made jobbing a particularly attractive business for large slaveholders.[27]

The jobbers' ultimate ambition was to gain enough wealth that they could sell their gang or—less likely because of the prohibitive costs—purchase land, settle their gang on it, and join the planter elite. To the sugar planters, purchasing a jobbing gang provided an opportunity to acquire seasoned slaves who were inured to the back-breaking labor of holing and enslaved people who were typically acquainted with their plantation and its slaves. Jobbers used the planters' desires to their advantage and valued their slaves at prices that were around a third to a half higher than for newly purchased Africans. If they sold their gang, jobbers either took their earnings back to Britain or remained in the Caribbean. Doctor Blaw sold his Jamaican gang for £3,071 sterling in 1776—more than enough to support a genteel lifestyle in his native Orkney—and retired to Britain three years later. In 1793, Doctor Benjamin Turney sold his seventy-five captives to the Golden Grove plantation for £4,257

[27] For the time taken to hole a cane piece and the cost of jobbing gangs versus individual hired slaves, see Cateau, "The New 'Negro' Business," 105; Dickson, *Mitigation*, 262-3; Ramsay, *Essay*, 119; Anon. *Minutes of the Society*, 12; Caines, *Letters*, 246. The demand for jobbing gangs was high enough in Barbados by the end of the eighteenth century that the costs rose to £4 in 1798. See, Edward Clarke to John Brathwaite, October 2, 1798, Correspondence of Edward Clarke, Estate Manager, 1795-1800, CP, C/COD/46. For estimates of jobbers' profits, see, Dickson, *Mitigation*, 264. Jobber John Scott wrote that he had earned £550 from jobbing out his fifty slaves, versus capital of £2,200, implying a twenty-five percent return. As the Jamaican millwright wrote, many jobbers "make much more" than the fourteen percent average return that he quoted. See, Testimony of Henry Coor in Lambert ed., *HCSP*, 82: 96. Sugar planters earned average annual rates of profits that fluctuated from 7.1 to 13.5 percent between 1749 and 1834. See, Ward, *British West Indian*, 48. For slave traders' profits, which averaged ten percent, see, Nicholas Radburn, "Guinea Factors, Slave Sales, and the Profits of the Transatlantic Slave Trade in Late Eighteenth-Century Jamaica: The Case of John Tailyour," *WMQ* 3d ser., 72, no. 2 (April 2015): 278-285. Riland, *Memoirs*, 208 ("three"). Dr. James Blaw to William Philip Perrin, Blue Mountain, January 13, 1775, FT, DRO, D239/M/E/16792 ("about"); Charles Ruddach to Charles Stuart, Clarendon, May 14, 1794, JMC, UM ("£1,400"); Simon Taylor to Chaloner Arcedeckne, Kingston, March 12, 1774 in Wood, ed., *Letters,* 126-7 ("near").

sterling and left the island "for good." At an earlier date, Golden Grove's overseer, John Kelly, sold his enormous gang of 140 slaves for the princely sum of £8,714. Kelly used the proceeds to form another jobbing gang and obtained the attorneyship of the nearby Duckenfield estate, one of the largest sugar plantations in the British Caribbean. According to one account, Kelly was making "twice as much" in profits as the "Proprietors" of Duckenfield by renting out his new gang to the estate. John Renny, a Scottish émigré who owned a jobbing gang in eastern Jamaica, purchased a small sugar estate by borrowing money from his affluent relatives and settled his slaves upon it. He was, he wrote, "heartily tired of Jobbing" and wanted to earn "income" from his slaves whether he remained in Jamaica or returned to Britain as an absentee. In the late 1780s, large numbers of jobbers in Barbados, Grenada, and Saint Vincent responded to rising cotton prices by settling their gangs on cotton plantation, which cost less than sugar estates and could be manned with fewer slaves. To landless whites who arrived in the Caribbean as ambitious migrants, the sale or settlement of their jobbing gangs meant that they had entered the plantocracy.[28]

Like sugar planters, jobbers were ruthless pragmatists who made their own careful decisions about how hard to push or preserve their slaves depending on the price of their labor and the value of their bodies. Sugar planters distanced themselves from the "cruel" jobbers to entrench class

[28] For the premium prices charged by jobbers for the sale of their slaves, see, John Jaques and Ralph Fisher to William Philip Perrin, Kingston, August 25, 1783, FT, DRO, D239/M/E/16991. Dr. James Blaw to William Philip Perrin, Blue Mountain, May 24, 1779, FT, DRO, D239/M/E/16876. For the sale of Turney's gang, see, Simon Taylor to Chaloner Arcdeckne, Kingston, February 4, 1794, TVAP, PLC, Vanneck-Arc/3A/1794/3 ("for good"); Simon Taylor to Chaloner Arcdeckne, Kingston, May 4, 1794, TVAP, PLC, Vanneck-Arc/3A/1794/7. For the sale of Kelly's gang, see, Simon Taylor to Chaloner Arcedeckne, Kingston, March 12, 1774 in Wood, ed., *Letters,* 126-7. For Kelly's attorneyship, see, Simon Taylor to Chaloner Arcedeckne, Kingston, October 29, 1782, TVAP, PLC, Vanneck-Arc/3A/82/44 ("twice"). For Kelly's second jobbing gang, see, Thomas Barritt to Nathaniel Philips, Phillipsfield, July 24, 1789, *JMSP*, BRRAM, 8344. Although the gross amounts yielded from the sales of these gang do not include outstanding debts, a letter from John Scott, who owned a fifty-person jobbing gang in Jamaica, reveals the large capitals that remained. Scott reported that he owned fifty slaves worth £4,500 Jamaican pounds and was due £950 for work performed by his gang—assets of £5,450. He owed £2,000 to Kingston slave factors for captive Africans, and had "small demands" for £300—liabilities of £2,300. That left him a "clear property of £3,150," which did not include his "Houses & trifling household furniture." Reduced to sterling, Scott was worth £2,250—a substantial sum. See, John Scott to James Mill, Ecclesjohn, September 8, 1794, TFP, WCL, Box 5. Lewis Cuthbert told the House of Lords that he knew "many proprietors of sugar estates, now in opulent circumstances" who had become so by purchasing and hiring out African slaves. See, Testimony of Lewis Cuthbert in *Minutes of the Evidence*, 77. For the movement of jobbing gangs onto cotton plantations, see, *Report of the Lords,* 290, 368, 427.

distinctions but "[a] jobber is not necessarily a hard master," one writer noted in the early nineteenth century, "in his case as well as in that of the sugar planter… it is his interest to take care of his slaves;" slaves were capital investments for the jobber as well as the planter. As William Beckford noted, "many" jobbers were "practioners of physic," and so they likely tried to use their knowledge of medicine to heal their captives when holing wore them down. Moreover, holing was task labor and so the jobber, who cared little about long-term soil erosion or the plantation's crop yields, could allow his slaves to dig shallower holes to mitigate their labor. Simon Taylor, for example, complained in 1784 that Golden Grove's cane fields had just been "[s]cratched instead of being holed" by a jobbing gang. Barbadian planters likewise complained in 1811 that jobbers did not dig deep enough holes for their canes. The slaves in jobbing gangs undoubtedly struggled to adapt to the brutal demands of much holing by simply digging shallower holes; their masters were willing to turn a blind eye in order to move them to the next field and, perhaps, help preserve their capital. Yet, the jobber' ultimate goal was still to profit quickly and advance his socioeconomic status and so, as one author noted in the early nineteenth century, "high [sugar] prices operate in increasing the labour and diminishing the comforts of jobbing gangs" because "[t]he price of their labour being raised … their owner is tempted to compress more of that labour into a small space … even at the expense of over-driving his slaves, and exposing to risk both their health and life." The demand for jobbing gangs soared with sugar prices, and the inflated sugar prices of 1790s during the Haitian Revolution likely significantly increased the planters' reliance on gangs and the willingness of their owners to push captives to hole faster and longer.[29]

[29] Cooper, *Facts Illustrative,* 63 ("A jobber"). William Beckford, *A Descriptive Account of the Island of Jamaica*… (London, 1790), 2: 345 ("many"). "Canes to be Cutt on Golden Grove Plantation in 1784," Vanneck- Arc/ 3A/ 1784/1 ("[s]cratched"). For the Barbadian complaints, see, Higman, *Slave Populations*, 164. Riland, *Memoirs*, 208 ("high" "[t]he price"). John Scott reported in 1794 that he had had "plenty of Jobbing" until "ye low price of Sugars" put a brief halt to the business. Scott had his slaves raise ginger until the demand for holing rose again (John Scott to John Tailyour, Ecclesjohn, April 28, 1793, TFP, WCL, Box 5). For the link between jobbing and sugar prices, see also, James Renny to John Tailyour, Morant Bay, December 12, 1794, TFP, WCL, Box 5.

Scattered records shed light on the bleak lives of the enslaved people who jobbers worked incessantly to build their fortunes. The five inventories that survive of individual jobbing gangs, all from late eighteenth-century Jamaica, suggest that these groups of slaves were strikingly different than permanently settled plantation communities. Whereas the proportion of permanent male and female plantation slaves tended to be balanced in the late eighteenth century, men were chosen almost exclusively for skilled and supervisory positions, meaning that the vast majority of the field workers were women. The gender composition of jobbing gangs varied considerably, but the majority had a balance of both men and women, tending slightly towards a male majority: of the 335 people in the five gangs, 187 were male, or fifty-six percent. However, almost every person in a jobbing gang, be they men or women, worked in the field because there were few supervisory or skilled slaves needed to hole a cane piece, beyond drivers. Jobbing gang slaves were also younger on average than plantation slaves and the jobbing gangs had both less children and less elderly people. The average age of Doctor Blaw's fifty slaves was twenty-four years old, and only five people were over thirty years old. Overseer John Bromfield's gang of fifty-four slaves averaged twenty-three years old, but none were over the age of fifty, and none under the age of fourteen (Figure 2). All five jobbing gangs included children but they only comprised eighteen percent of the slaves. When Blaw's gang, which included a disproportionate number of children, is exempted, the numbers are more striking: just ten percent were adolescents. By comparison, in 1782 at York, a large sugar plantation in Jamaica's Saint James' parish, the average age of the 448 slaves was twenty-seven but twenty-six percent were children and seven percent were over the age of fifty (Figure 3). Presumably, jobbers sold slaves who lived beyond or they died young. And, as one abolitionist wrote in the nineteenth century, children were in the "peculiar danger of being sold to accommodate the circumstances of their owners." Jobbing slaves,

with few elderly people and children, must have struggled to form multi-generational communities and pass on cultures and traditions.[30]

Insert Figure 2 here

Insert Figure 3 here

Jobbing slaves were not only younger but they were also more likely than plantation slaves to be African in origin. In his comprehensive analysis of the slave population of Jamaica, c.1829-32, B.W. Higman discovered that the highest proportion of Africans was "found in the jobbing gangs." Given that Higman's statistics were recorded twenty-two years after the abolition of the slave trade, they likely understate the proportion of Africans in jobbing gangs in the pre-abolition era. In a series of explanatory notes accompanying the inventory of his jobbing gang, for example, Blaw explained that he had "always made of point to buy" slaves "rather young than otherwise out of the Ship;" another man built a whole jobbing gang by purchasing people "from the ships."[31] Jobbers forced these Africans "to hard labour as soon as they are bought." In April 1784, for example, a Jamaican

[30] The five inventories are: "List of Negroes Bought by Malcolm Laing of William Gray as Valued by Thomas French & John Nixon Esqrs Vizt," 1769, FT, DRO, D239/M/E/18207; "A List of Negroes belonging to James Blaw with their Qualifications & c," 1775, Ibid., D239/M/E/17731; "List of Doctor McKays Negroes purchased for William Philip Perrin Esqr. 1st July 1795," Ibid., D239/M/E/17170; "A Valuation of Negroes belonging to James McViccar Affleck Esqr. Taken this 10th day of July 1796 by William Innes & Robert Whitfinch Esqrs at the request of the said James McViccar Affleck and William Sutherland Esquires," Ibid., D239/M/E/17208; "List of Mr John Bromfield's Negroes with their Age & Valuation," 1797, Ibid., D239/M/E/17219. In Doctor Blaw's gang, just two of the fifty slaves had non-field occupations, and those two slaves were drivers. Bromfield's gang of fifty-four people had seven skilled slaves. However, three of those people also worked in the field. For women doing the majority of field work, see Richard Dunn, "Sugar Production and Enslaved Women in Jamaica," in Ira Berlin and Philip D. Morgan, eds., *Cultivation and Culture: Labor and the Shaping of Slave Life in the Americas* (Richmond, 1993), 49-72. For York plantation, see Figure 3. Cooper, *Facts Illustrative,* 62 ("peculiar").

[31] Higman, *Slave Population and Economy in Jamaica*, 79 ("found in"). Higman based his analysis on the percentage of African slaves who died. Using that metric, fifty-nine percent of the slaves in jobbing gangs were Africans, compared to forty-six percent on coffee estates and just thirty-two percent on sugar plantations. "A List of Negroes belonging to James Blaw with their Qualifications & c," 1775, FT, DRO, D239/M/E/17731 ("always"). John Jaques and Ralph Fisher to William Philip Perrin, Kingston, February 2, 1785, FT, DRO, D239/M/E/17078 ("from the"). Reflecting on the pre-abolition era, pro-slavery writer Alexander Barclay wrote that "there was scarcely an overseer that was not an owner of slaves--scarcely a person black or brown who could afford it but had purchased one or more from the Guinea ships" (*A Practical View*, 258. Emphasis added). Planters' ethnic biases and stereotypes about the bellicosity of "Coromantees," that is Akan speaking slaves, may have meant that they were disproportionately represented in the jobbing gangs. William Beckford thought that Africans from that region had a more "savage" and "intrepid" nature and were not suited to "be fixed upon" a plantation because they "do not easily domesticate, and form attachments." He suggested, however, that they "may do very well for jobbers." See, Beckford, *Remarks*, 11.

bookkeeper and jobber wrote to his uncle that he had purchased fourteen Africans captives and had hired them out just six weeks later to clear twenty acres—laborious work that involved felling trees and lifting heavy stones. This stands in contrast to the periods of rest prescribed by the wealthiest sugar planters to "season" newly arrived Africans. Jobbing slaves' incessant work must have been an unimaginably miserable experience, especially for captives who had spent months trapped aboard a slave ship. Forcing Africans to hard labor to quickly extract profits, regardless of the effects on their health, was apparently a deliberate strategy on the jobber's part. The "jobber thinks only of immediate profits," one Jamaican planter-attorney observed, "he never thinks of the slow mode of increasing the value of his gang by natural increase."[32]

Jobbers lodged the Africans whom they purchased in small work camps. If they were owned by the overseer, jobbing gangs typically lived on the plantation itself. A map of Golden Grove, for example, shows a fifty-acre plot leased to John Kelly and his jobbing gang, a mile from the plantation slaves' houses and in the woods. Other jobbers purchased small pieces of land for themselves, either marginal plots in the hills or woods between the fertile sugar producing areas, or livestock "pens" with cattle, mules, poultry and sheep. Like plantation slaves, jobbing gangs were forced to erect huts and grow their own food in provision grounds. They also had to tend livestock and plant ginger, pimiento, and coffee, which they were expected to cultivate and harvest in the brief time they spent at home. Kelly's land even included a structure labelled as "Kelly's Folly," implying that he had his gang working on frivolous construction projects in their meager spare time.[33]

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[32] William Sutherland to John Jaques & Malcolm Laing, Blue Mountain, November 24, 1783, FT, DRO, D239/M/E/17766 ("to hard"). For the lack of seasoning in jobbing gangs, see also, Beckford, *Remarks,* 12. Charles Ruddach to Charles Stewart, Kingston, April 1, 1784, JMC, UF; Charles Ruddach to Charles Stewart, Saint Toolie Estate, Clarendon, May 16, 1784, Ibid. For the lengthy process of "seasoning" on sugar plantations, see for example, Testimony of Simon Taylor in *Minutes of the Evidence,* 125-127; Testimony of Lewis Cuthbert in Ibid., 66-7. William Sutherland to William Philip Perrin, Blue Mountain, January 14, 1798, FT, DRO, D239/M/E/17843 ("the jobber").

[33] For Kelly's land, see, Higman, *Plantation Jamaica,* 170. For crops and livestock raised by jobbers, see, Dickson, *Mitigation*, 264; John Scott to John Tailyour, Saint Thomas in the East, April 28, 1793, TFP, WCL; Higman, *Slave population and economy in Jamaica*, 27. Of the forty-five gangs in the Saint James' census, eighteen were listed simply as "jobber" implying that their owners exclusively pursued that business. Fourteen were listed as "Pen & Jobber;" nine "Overseer & Jobber;" one

Jobbing gangs roamed the countryside depending on when and where their owners found them work. They usually toiled on the same plantation for which their owner worked, or nearby estates with whom their owner was acquainted. Jobbing slaves thought working "near home," one nineteenth-century observer wrote, "particularly advantageous" because they did not have to walk far to start the taxing work of holing and could return home to collect provisions at night. On other occasions, jobbers contracted with plantations that were as far as twenty miles away, and so the slaves had to spend several hours trudging on rough and often washed-out roads. Once at more distant plantations, their owner forced them to erect a "hut, consisting of one long room;" alternatively they were made to sleep in the plantation slaves' houses, or in the estate's works. Jobbing slaves returned to their homes "every Friday evening or Saturday," one former overseer wrote, where they were expected to tend their provisions grounds and prepare enough food to serve them for the week. On Monday morning, they returned to their work sites to begin holing again, carrying with them a week's worth of provisions. It was hence difficult for these roaming slaves to tend to provision grounds of their own and trade their surplus for small luxuries at market. While they were away from home, their unattended provision grounds could be also easily plundered by thieves or trampled by livestock. Mobility did give jobbing slaves some advantages. They made a "numerous acquaintance" with free men and slaves, certainly more than a stationary plantation slave, and so they formed friendship and romantic bonds with slaves on the plantations they visited. And the numerous Africans in jobbing gangs could find captives who shared their languages and cultures, and even maintain contact with

"Surveyor & Jobber;" one "Millwright & Jobber;" one "Pimento Walk & Jobber;" and one "Doctor & Jobber." See "Settlers in the Parish of Saint James next in degree to sugar planters consisting of Pens, Coffee planters, Jobbers, Millwrights, Carpenters, Masons & suchlike," Edward Long Papers, British Library, Add Ms. 12435. Newspaper advertisements for the sale of jobbing gangs are also revealing of their lodgings and occupations when not holing. William Huey offered his gang of thirty slaves for sale in his "Mountain" near Kingston, a 130-acre plot, 70 acres of which were "in coffee." His slaves had "good houses" and provision grounds that "abound[ed] with plenty of plantains, yams, and cocoa." See, *The Kingston Gazette,* October 2, 1779. Another man sold his gang of eighty-five slaves a year later along with his eighty acre "Mountain Plantation" east of Kingston, where seventy acres were "planted in Provisions and Ginger." See, Ibid., November 11, 1780.

shipmates. Jobbing slaves likely became conduits of information for enslaved people, linking together shipmates, friends, and co-linguists over the long distances that they travelled.[34]

While every slave spent their days toiling for capricious masters, jobbing slaves had one of the most laborious calendars of any captive in the Americas. In addition to the drudgery of marching long distances and struggling to raise provisions, jobbing slaves had "hard labour to perform" from sun up to sun down. Whereas plantation slaves might only hole one or two cane pieces at a time, jobbing slaves had to dig throughout the holing season, which stretched for seven agonizing months. They also holed sporadically outside the main season, enabling planters to put in canes later or allow them to come into bearing at key moments in the year; some planters likely hired jobbing gangs out of season because they were more readily available. And in the five months that they were not doing their primary work of holing, jobbers hired their slaves out to do other laborious tasks, such as digging roads, felling trees, building fences, hauling heavy baskets of dung, tending crops and animals, "hoe-ploughing" fields, assisting with the harvest, and planting provisions.[35]

Enslaved sugar workers experienced exhausting labors and malnourishment, but jobbing slaves were, numerous contemporaries thought, "more worn down and wretched." Four different witnesses compared jobbing slaves to work-horses whose masters worked them to their "last expiring

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[34] Cooper, *Facts Illustrative*, 61 ("near home"), 62 ("hut"). For the distances travelled by jobbers, see, De La Beche, *Notes* (London, 1825), 34. Thome and Kimball, *Emancipation of the West Indies. A six months' tour in Antigua, Barbadoes, and Jamaica, in the year 1837* (New York, 1838), 297 ("every Friday"). According to one witness, jobbing gangs were "less furnished with grounds for themselves than the Negroes upon estates." See, Testimony of Lewis Cuthbert in *Minutes of the Evidence,* 109. There may be some truth in this. John Scott, for example, complained that he had was "under ye necessity of Buying provisions for ye most of my Negroes" because the land upon which he lodged them was "entirely wore out" (John Scott to John Tailyour, Ecclesjohn, February 4, 1794, TFP, WCL, Box 5). Slaves who "ate their week's allowance in three or four days," one witness wrote, was "under the necessity to labor" after finishing holing to receive further provisions (Testimony of Henry Giles in Lambert ed., *HCSP,* 82: 104). For the destruction of jobbing gangs' grounds while they were away, see for example, Sturge and Harvey *The West Indies in 1837*, 307-308. John Jaques and Ralph Fisher to William Philip Perrin, Kingston, August 25, 1783, FT, DRO, D239/M/E/16991 ("numerous").

[35] De La Beche, *Notes,* 22 ("hard labour"). For the variety of tasks performed by jobbing gangs, see for example, Thomas Barrit to Nathaniel Philips, Philipsfield, January 21, 1790, *JMSP*, BRRAM, 8351; Annual Abstract of Accounts for 1785, FT, DRO, D239/M/E/20696. Newspaper advertisements for the sale of jobbing gangs also indicate the variety of tasks that the slaves performed outside of the holing season. One jobber noted that their slaves were capable both of holing, and "doing the other necessary duty on the plantation." See, *The Kingston Gazette,* October 2, 1779. James Renny said that his eighty captives were "accustomed to Jobbing, and all kinds of Plantation Work." See, *The Royal Gazette,* July 5, 1794.

sob." These comments, largely from abolitionists, are borne out by the testimony of planters and even jobbers themselves. "In the hands of jobbers," planter-historian William Beckford wrote, "it is amazing what numbers of negroes die." Jamaican overseer and jobber William Fitzmaurice told Parliament that he had purchased ninety-five slaves, and that he sold fifty-two just four years later—a loss of almost half of his captives. Doctor Blaw "lost upwards of 20 Negroes in the space of 6 or 7 years in forming" his gang of forty-nine slaves. Blaw killed almost a third of the slaves he purchased, even though he lodged them on a "dry healthy hill." The reasons for these deaths are implicit in Blaw's notes accompanying his list of slaves: the "hardships of jobbing." These "hardships" were so terrible that jobbing was, according to one nineteenth-century commentator, "universally regarded by the negroes as the worst kind of service." "So great is the objection they have of being sold to jobbers," one planter wrote, "that I have known many of them run away to avoid it" Another witness opined that plantation slaves faced the continual fear of "being converted into jobbing gangs" when their masters fell into "pecuniary distress." An enslaved community on a Bahamas cotton plantation staged a revolted in 1830 to prevent their master from converting them into a jobbing gang on a neighboring island.[36]

A few jobbing slaves may have been able to revolt or flee the grueling labor of holing, but the majority escaped jobbing only through sale to plantations. Jobbing slaves were, according to one Jamaican attorney, "happy when they are fixed for life upon a larger Estate" because they no longer had to "work on different Estates." While it is difficult to test this statement, former jobbing slaves

[36] For comparisons between jobbing gangs and draft animals, see, Riland, *Memoirs*, 137 ("more worn"), 209 ("So great"); *The Christian Reformer, Or, New Evangelical Miscellany* (Hackney, 1826) 12: 116 ("last expiring"); *Substance of the Debate* ..., 202; Cooper, *Facts Illustrative*, 61-62. Beckford, *Descriptive Account*, 2: 345 ("In the"). Testimony of William Fitzmaurice in Lambert ed., *HCSP,* 82: 230. Dr. James Blaw to William Philip Perrin, Blue Mountain, January 13, 1775, FT, DRO, D239/M/E/16792 ("lost upwards" "dry, healthy"). "A List of Negroes belonging to James Blaw with their Qualifications & c," 1775, FT, DRO, D239/M/E/17731 ("the hardships"). Thome and Kimball, *Emancipation*, 296 ("universally"). *Analysis of the Report of a Committee of the House of Commons on the Extinction of Slavery* (London, 1833), 68 ("being converted"). Michael Craton, "We Shall Not Be Moved: Pompey's Slave Revolt in Exhuma Island, Bahamas, 1830," *Nieuwe West-Indische Gids / New West Indian Guide* 57: 1/2 (1983): 19-35.

could tend their provision grounds and become enmeshed in more permanent slave communities. Some former jobbing slaves may have been able to live permanently with their wives or husbands, many of whom they formed relationships with while they roamed the countryside, or on the plantation where they were encamped. Kelly's gang, for example, already had their "Houses & Grounds" on Golden Grove to which they were sold in 1774, and at least five of them subsequently had children there. And Doctor Affleck's gang of 141 slaves were "intimately connected" to the slaves on a nearby Jamaican sugar plantation, to which they were meant to be sold in 1796. Sale to a plantation also meant that jobbing slaves had an opportunity—albeit a slim one—to finally escape the grinding work of holing and move into non-field positions. Of the forty-three slaves from Kelly's gang who were still living in 1790 (twenty-six years after their sale) twenty-one no longer worked in the field, for example. While sale to a plantation did not end jobbing slaves' miseries, it did offer the chance to start families and to perform different kinds of work.[37]

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"With the jobbing gang," a visitor to Jamaica wrote in 1828, "appeared another and a new view of slavery:" plantation-less masters who hired out large roving gangs of slaves to perform the most physically taxing tasks on sugar plantations. Although marginal in the historiography, the slaves working in jobbing gangs may have comprised ten percent of the enslaved population of the British Caribbean in the last quarter of the eighteenth century, rising higher in the most fertile sugar-growing parishes. Moreover, with between thirty and 150 captives in each gang, they were some of the largest slave holdings in the Atlantic World. The lives of these slaves challenge our understanding of the experience of Caribbean slavery. Enslaved sugar workers were not just life prisoners on plantations,

[37] William Sutherland to John Jaques & Malcolm Laing, Blue Mountain, February 11, 1783, FT, DRO, D239/M/E/17758 ("happy"). Simon Taylor to Chaloner Arcedekne, Kingston, May 1, 1773 in Wood, ed., *Letters,* 118 ("Houses"). William Sutherland to William Philip Perrin, Blue Mountain, May 6, 1796, FT, DRO, D239/M/E/17817 ("intimately"). For the subsequent lives of Kelly's slaves, see, the inventories of slaves taken on Golden Grove on June 30, 1790 (TVAP, PLC, Vanneck-Arc/3A/1790/41); January 1, 1791 (TVAP, PLC, Vanneck-Arc/3A/1790/47); January, 1, 1792 (TVAP, PLC, Vanneck-Arc/3A/1792/1); June 30, 1792 (TVAP, PLC, Vanneck-Arc/3A/1792/5).

but could instead be highly mobile, covering tens of miles in a single week, working at multiple sites, and interacting with numerous communities of other slaves. The trajectory of a typical jobbing slave over the course of their life—from initial purchase from a slave ship, through their roving labors, and then, perhaps, an ultimate sale to a plantation—also demonstrates that slaves often shifted from a mobile to a stationary status; plantation slaves could be sold to jobbing gangs and make the shift from stationary to mobile. Studying jobbing slave thus prompts us to think about the experiences of the tens of thousands of slaves who were not attached to plantations in the British Caribbean, but whose lives were still shaped by the draconian violence and unmitigated work of agricultural slave labor.[38]

Exploring jobbing gangs also highlights the importance of the trans-Atlantic slave trade for enabling innovative, but highly exploitative, new forms of enslaved labor to flourish in the Americas. It was the availability of Africans through the slave trade, coupled with the enormous sums that could be earned by hiring those Africans out, that initially led to the development of jobbing gangs in the early eighteenth century. A supply of replacement workers enabled ambitious whites to work their captives literally to death while still earning large profits—what one nineteenth century observer rightly called a "sordid and cruel calculation." And the existence of a large pool of hired enslaved laborers allowed planters to shift the most arduous labors onto Africans in jobbing gangs, while simultaneously enabling them to preserve their own slaves. The work of holing was "hard on the hired negroes," one Jamaican planter candidly wrote, but it "at least relives my own."[39] Moreover, planters could monitor the price and availability of African slaves, making the acquisition of new workers through the slave trade less pressing. Given that jobbing gangs were a phenomenon that was almost literally shackled to the slave trade, it is hence not surprising that the numbers of slaves in jobbing gangs dwindled rapidly after abolition.

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[38] Anon, *Marly, or, a Planter's Life in Jamaica* (London, 1828), 166 ("With the").
[39] *Substance of the Debate ... on 15 May 1823 on a Motion for the Mitigation of Slavery* (London, 1823), 202 ("sordid"). Lewis, *Journal,* 101-102 ("hard").

Seen in this way, the slave trade did not force planters to resist innovation and change, as abolitionists and an older generation of historians have suggested. Rather, it encouraged whites to think of ways to commodify and exploit African laborers, creating a new form of labor that melded the draconian violence and coercive control of Atlantic slavery with the flexibility that historians more readily associate with capitalistic wage-labor. This new system of labor helped sugar planters to massively increase the productivity of their estates in an era when slave prices rose faster than sugar prices, but without increasing the burdens upon their own slaves. But it was only the ceaseless toil and premature deaths of thousands of jobbing slaves that enabled this new system to flourish. Paradoxically, then, the planters' demand for hired workers to mitigate the labor of their own slaves made some people even more disposable, nothing more than a notation in an expense account, invisible and forgotten.