# "[M]anaged at first as if they were beasts:" The Seasoning of Enslaved Africans in Eighteenth-Century Jamaica

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In April 1754, Richard Beckford, the owner of almost a thousand enslaved people in Jamaica, penned a lengthy manuscript guide to plantation management. Beckford explained that the "Success of my plantations… chiefly depend[ed]" on "governing ye minds of my Slaves as Well as exercising their Bodies in a reasonable Manner." Although Beckford urged the exercise of "Justice & Benevolence" to all enslaved people, he emphasized that particular care needed to be taken with recently arrived Africans. They should be "treated with a very gentle hand & must be inured to labour by degrees," otherwise "despair" would "tak[e] possession of their Minds" and "all Medicine & future care will be to no purpose."[2] Beckford's instructions illustrate an important distinction that British Caribbean enslavers made between newly arrived Africans and plantation-born slaves in their management regimes. Planters believed that Africans needed to be "seasoned" over a several-year period to habituate them to the new disease environment and to plantation labor. Enslavers developed numerous seasoning strategies, which they exchanged verbally and via manuscripts such as Beckford's. By the late eighteenth century, plantation manuals also publicized seasoning techniques, and they typically followed Beckford in advocating a policy of mild treatment towards Africans for several years. Even so, some promoted a much harsher program for seasoning enslaved people.[3] Writing twenty years after Beckford, planter-historian Edward Long claimed that Africans were "of so savage a

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[2] "Mr. Richard Beckford's Instruction to Messrs. John Cope, Richard Lewing and Robert Mason," Apr 10, 1754, Thomas Thistlewood Papers, OSB MSS 176, Box 11, Folder 81, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University, New Haven, Conn. (hereafter TTP).

[3] See for example, James Grainger, *On the Treatment and Management of the More Common West-India Diseases* (London, 1764), 11; Dr. Collins, *Practical Rules for the Management and Medical Treatment of Negro Slaves, in the Sugar Colonies,* (London, 1803), 51-85.

disposition" that they "scarcely differ from the wild beasts of the wood." "Such men," Long added, "must be managed at first as if they were beasts; they must be tamed, before they can be treated like men."[4]

Scholars have not adequately explored the distinction that British American planters such as Long and Beckford made between unseasoned and seasoned slaves in management strategies. Studies of individual plantations do appreciate that Africans underwent a seasoning, but they usually treat the enslaved community as a single entity.[5] Works focused on the African experience of the slave trade rarely follow captives through their seasoning.[6] The few historians who have examined the seasoning process in depth have emphasized its importance for both the creation of slave cultures and the destruction of lives.[7] But the social aspects of seasoning are largely absent from this literature. Recent scholarship has revealed that slave communities were starkly divided by gender, occupation and age, because of the complexities of sugar production and planters' desire to create a workforce that could feed itself.[8] Enslaved people tried to climb this steep social ladder by seeking skilled occupations and fiercely defending their rights to rations of food and access to the most productive provision grounds. In so doing, captives sought to "survive slavery."[9]

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[4] [Edward Long], *The History of Jamaica* . . . (London, 1774), II, 461.
[5] For works on plantations that touch on seasoning, see Richard Dunn, *A Tale of Two Plantations: Slave Life and Labor in Jamaica and Virginia* (Cambridge Mass., 2014), 157-59; B. W Higman, *Montpelier, Jamaica: A Plantation Community in Slavery and Freedom, 1739-1912* (Mona, Jamaica, 1998), 36-37.
[6] The exception is Stephanie Smallwood, *Saltwater Slavery: A Middle Passage from Africa to American Diaspora* (Cambridge Mass., 2007), 182-207, who ties the seasoning process to the creation of African American cultures.
[7] Michael Mullin, *Africa in America: Slave Acculturation and Resistance in the American South and the British Caribbean, 1736-1831* (Urbana, 1992); Walter C. Rucker, *The River Flows On: Black Resistance, Culture, and Identity Formation in Early America* (Baton Rouge, 2006); Vincent Brown, *The Reaper's Garden: Death and Power in the World of Atlantic Slavery* (Cambridge Mass., 2008), 50-51; Alexander X. Byrd, *Captives and Voyagers: Black Migrants across the Eighteenth-Century British Atlantic World* (Baton Rouge, 2008), 57-85; Shantel George, "Tracing the Ethnic Origins of Enslaved Africans in Grenada," *Atlantic Studies* 17:2 (Oct 2018), 160-183.
[8] 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 (Jul 2014), 458–73.
[9] Randy M. Browne, *Surviving Slavery in the British Caribbean* (Philadelphia, 2017).

What strategies did planters employ to forcibly integrate impoverished and traumatized Africans into these divided slave communities? Beckford's program of light labor and "gentle" treatment, or Long's regimen of discipline and violence? And how did Africans try to "survive" their seasoning? This article answers these questions by examining the seasoning of enslaved people on Egypt, a 1500-acre sugar plantation in Jamaica's Westmoreland parish. With just eighty-nine resident enslaved people in 1751, Egypt was a "marginal" plantation that has gained the attention of historians only because Thomas Thistlewood, its overseer between 1751 and 1767, kept daily diaries.[10] Thistlewood's journals provide unparalleled detail on Egypt's slaves, including twenty-five Africans (fifteen men, eight women and two boys) who arrived between May 1754 and June 1755.[11] By examining Thistlewood's diary entries from May 1754 until December 1760, the seasoning of these twenty-five named individuals can be reconstructed. Such an approach provides greater detail on the African experience of seasoning then any study to date.[12]

Although focused on a small cohort of Africans, the example of Egypt can shed new light on the seasoning experienced by enslaved people elsewhere in Jamaica and the British Caribbean. Jamaica's Westmoreland Parish was principally opened to plantation agriculture in the early eighteenth century, but it was, by Thistlewood's time, no longer a frontier. Examining Egypt therefore enables us to study how enslaved people were seasoned on plantations that had reached maturity—the most common form of agricultural estate in Jamaica by mid-century. Even at maturity, Egypt produced little

[10] For Egypt, see Trevor Burnard, *Mastery, Tyranny, and Desire: Thomas Thistlewood and His Slaves in the Anglo-Jamaican World* (Chapel Hill, 2004), 299 ("marginal"). For Thistlewood, see also Douglas Hall, *In Miserable Slavery: Thomas Thistlewood in Jamaica, 1750-86* (Mona, Jamaica, 1999). Thistlewood's diaries (hereafter DTT) are in TPP. The references for the diaries consulted are: 1754 (Box 1, Folder 5); 1755 (Box 2, Folder 6); 1756 (Box 2, Folder 7); 1757 (Box 2, Folder 8); 1758 (Box 2, Folder 9); 1759 (Box 2, Folder 10); 1760 (Box 2, Folder 11).

[11] Four groups of Africans arrived at Egypt after June 1755, but Thistlewood's diary entries are not sufficiently descriptive to identify all of their names or the seasoning regime to which he subjected them. See DTT, Jan 13, 1756 (five men, five women); Jan 16, 1758 (four people); Jul 4, 1758 (one man); Nov 17, 1758 (five girls).

[12] Contemporaries had different views on how long it took for an African to become seasoned. Some thought a year, others two or three. I have opted for a longer period to examine both the seasoning and the longer-term impacts on the twenty-five individuals.

when compared to the enormous sugar estates found elsewhere on the island. Like those other plantations, though, it was worked almost entirely by enslaved people, most of them Africans. John Cope, Egypt's owner, also forced his captives to grow and process sugar using the same techniques as planters elsewhere in Jamaica and the wider British Caribbean. Cope's overseer, Thomas Thistlewood, was also entirely representative of other whites in his own management methods.[13] Focusing on Egypt therefore allows us to see how enslaved people were seasoned on an established British Caribbean sugar plantation—the locations to which most Africans were marched after their arrival through Britain's slave trade.

Through its forensic study of enslaved individuals in Britain's largest and most important plantation colony, this article demonstrates that Jamaican whites did season Africans through a carefully designed management regime. They did not employ the scheme outlined by Beckford, in which Africans would be gradually introduced to the workforce over several years. Rather, they used Long's harsh and violent program to brutally "tame" Africans to plantation life. Enslaved people fiercely resisted this process, but whites developed effective strategies to overcome opposition. African men were systematically beaten and tortured; women were subject to rape and sexual assault. Whites simultaneously proffered advancement to those who acquiesced to—or even collaborated with—the plantation system. This system of punishments and rewards was highly effective in transforming captive Africans into American slaves, and seasoning strategies were consequently a key component of plantation management that deserve much further study.

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[13] For Thistlewood's typicality, see Burnard, *Mastery,* 30-1.

Shortly after Beckford wrote his instructions in April 1754, Thistlewood received them, likely via John Cope, one of Beckford's attorneys and, from December 1754, Egypt's owner.[14] Thistlewood, who had arrived on the island four years earlier, believed that he could learn much about plantation management from a grandee such as Beckford, and he therefore transcribed the instructions into his commonplace book. When he copied these instructions, he had managed Egypt's eighty-nine enslaved people for three years, but had not seasoned Africans.[15] This soon changed, as Cope sought to boost sugar production by purchasing captives through Jamaica's expanding slave trade.[16] On May 25, 1754, Cope acquired an Igbo-speaking man and, over the next thirteen months, he would purchase another twenty-four individuals from three different ships (Table 1): eight in June 1754 (three men and five women), six in September 1754 (four men and two boys); and ten in June 1755 (seven men and three women).[17] The twenty-five Africans brought to Egypt in 1754/5 would, with the exception of the first man, undertake their seasoning with their shipmates—captives who had shared the trauma of the Middle Passage together.[18]

The Africans began their seasoning the moment that Cope purchased them. He likely bought his captives directly from ships at Savanna-la-Mar, a port town just eight miles from Egypt. He would have selected from the Africans aboard the vessels, likely with the assistance of enslaved men from

[14] John Cope married Molly, the daughter of Egypt's owner William Dorrill, on May 3, 1754 (DTT). Cope managed Egypt thereafter—including the buying of Africans—until he assumed ownership of the estate after the death of his father-in-law on Dec 11, 1754.

[15] Thistlewood had managed thirteen Africans during his previous employment at Vineyard Pen, but they were there upon his arrival. See Philip D. Morgan, "Slaves and Livestock in Eighteenth-Century Jamaica: Vineyard Pen, 1750-1751," *William and Mary Quarterly* 52:1 (Jan. 1995): 47–76; Verene Shepherd, *Livestock, Sugar and Slavery: Contested Terrain in Colonial Jamaica* (Kingston, Jamaica, 2009), 14-47.

[16] Slave landings in Jamaica in these years amounted to 8,979 people (1753); 11,334 (1754); 14,678 (1755). See *Slave Voyages* (www.slavevoyages.org), Estimates section, Disembarkation Regions: Jamaica.

[17] Thistlewood did not attend the sales, but did record the arrival of the Africans, who were accompanied by their enslaved guides. For the purchase of the twenty-five Africans, DTT, May 25, 1754; Jun 13, 1754; Sep 9, 1754; Jun 4, 1755.

[18] Cope likely divided his purchase across vessels to spread the cost of new workers, and to obtain healthy Africans aged from their late teens to upper twenties Such buying strategies were common in Jamaica. See William Vassall to John Wedderburn, London, Apr 29, 1776 in *The Vassall Letter Books, 1769-1800* (Wakefield, 1963).

his estate.[19] The captives would then have been landed ashore and issued clothing made from oznaburg, a coarse and drab fabric normally reserved to clothe the enslaved.[20] Dressed in the dull uniform of the plantation slave, the Africans were pushed away from the docks by one of Cope's enslaved assistants; Cope likely remained in Savanna to settle business with the slave factor. Escape was nearly impossible as the Africans trudged to Egypt. Psychological trauma, physical weakness, the assault on the senses brought on by an alien environment, and the desire to stay with shipmates presented almost insurmountable barriers to elopement.[21] Nonetheless, the forced march to Egypt allowed the Africans to gain some sense of their coming fate, as they passed enslaved people on the roads and saw them cutting canes in the fields.

Upon their arrival, Thistlewood subjected the Africans to a program designed to forcibly integrate the captives into the slave community. He renamed them with the assistance of Egypt's slaves, and then handed them cane knives and hoes.[22] He then assigned the newcomers to houses and provision grounds using one of two methods that were well-established in Jamaica. Under the first, the Africans were, as experienced planter William Beckford described, "quarter[ed] upon old [slaves]."[23] Enslaved mentors were meant to teach the newcomers English, how to dig a provision ground, and the rules of the plantation, while also providing shelter and food.[24] In this way, Africans learned plantation ways without needing to be fed by the planter. Thistlewood "quartered" the first

[19] For the use of enslaved people to select Africans at Jamaican sales see DTT, Apr 29, 1765. Cope may have branded the captives in Savanna, given that it was common practice. See Bryan Edwards, *The History, Civil and Commercial, of the British Colonies in the West Indies,* II (Dublin, 1793), 65.
[20] For clothing issued to Africans, see Testimony of Simon Taylor in *Minutes of the Evidence Taken at the Bar of the House of Lords*… (London, 1792), 125.
[21] Just two enslaved people are recorded as having escaped on the road from a slave sale. See *The Jamaica Mercury,* Kingston, Jamaica, May 6, 1780; *Cornwall Chronicle,* Montego Bay, Jamaica, Jul 18, 1793.
[22] When the first man arrived, Thistlewood recorded in his diary, "Our Negroes have Nam'd him Hector." Three weeks later, Thistlewood wrote that "we" named eight other slaves. See DTT, May 25, 1754; Jun 13, 1754. Thistlewood almost certainly renamed some of the captives himself; he labeled one of the men "Derby," presumably after a town near Lincoln, his own birthplace.
[23] William Beckford, *Remarks Upon the Situation of Negroes in Jamaica* (London, 1788), 27.
[24] Thistlewood wrote that Africans should be "taught to count to twenty will pronounce most English words," indicating that he spent little time himself teaching enslaved people English. See DTT, Jan 26, 1756.

nine Africans in this way, with men and women assigned wards of the same gender; he assigned seven of the nine newcomers to the grounds of Egypt's slaves.[25] On Sundays, captives had to carve out new plots from old grounds that had run into weeds. Working in a gang, they hacked back brush, holed it with corn, and then planted starchy root vegetables and plantains. Once in full bearing, the land was divided into individual grounds that were meant to feed their tenders for life. Meanwhile, captives built their own houses, within which they may have lived with their shipmates or new partners.[26] Africans faced numerous challenges as they tried to establish themselves, however. Captives with little knowledge of agriculture struggled to maintain an allotment; hungry people found it difficult to attain self-sufficiency, as they devoured crops the moment they grew.[27] Egypt's slaves, who were themselves victims of exploitation, were also apt to make the newcomers work for their subsistence, or for nothing.

Fearing that Africans would become the servants of other slaves, rather than whites, Thistlewood employed a second method to integrate them.[28] He assigned six Africans who arrived in September 1754 to the houses of Egypt's slaves, but not their grounds. Instead, the Africans were expected to dig their own grounds while Thistlewood fed them at noon in a so-called "pot gang."[29] Seasoned slaves rarely joined this gang, except the "sick, infirm and helpless."[30] Jamaican enslavers therefore sought to shame Africans into growing their own food by equating them with invalids and children. The "pot gang" system was also designed to make the Africans beholden to Thistlewood and not to Egypt's slaves and, therefore, made them more open to exploitation. He further encouraged

[25] DTT, Jun 13, 1754.
[26] For the creation of provision grounds and houses, see Testimony of Simon Taylor in *Minutes of the Evidence…,* 125. For the issuing of seeds for provision grounds, DTT, Oct 26, 1754.
[27] Beckford, *Remarks,* 29.
[28] For planters disproving of assigning Africans to the grounds of existing slaves, see Long, *History,* II, 435.
[29] Planters obtained food for the pot by buying it from slaves or growing it on special provision grounds. See Testimony of Lewis Cuthbert in *Minutes of the Evidence…,* 64.
[30] TTP, "Mr. Richard Beckford's Instructions."

the Africans to hasten their work by keeping them at a bare subsistence level: each person typically received a herring and a pint of flour a day, and a few plantains if in need.[31] Africans fed from the pot were consequently as hungry as those who worked for their sustenance in the grounds of Egypt's slaves, a situation that would lead to dire consequences.

Although Thistlewood copied Beckford's advice that Africans should be "inured to labour by degrees," he ignored these sentiments and immediately put the captives to work.[32] On June 14, 1754, just one day after the first group of Africans arrived, Thistlewood wrote that he had "ye New Negroes out at work with ye old ones;" he sent the second and third groups of Africans to work two and six days after their respective arrivals (Table 1).[33] All but two of the twenty-five Africans were put into the field gang; two boys were "put to look after the cattle" until they reached adulthood, when Thistlewood sent them to the field.[34] Approximately two months after their arrival, Thistlewood issued each African with a cooking pot, presumably to prepare crops grown in their grounds. Around the same time, each captive received a dung basket to begin hauling heavy loads of manure to the cane fields.[35] Africans thus spent as little as a week, and sometimes just a single day, on Egypt before they entered the field; they were expected to perform heavy labor within two months.

Thrusting traumatized and weakened Africans immediately into the fields seems counterintuitive, especially given that advice such as Beckford's proscribed a period of rest. Beyond its cruelty, such a strategy appears economically irrational, as it risked killing Africans before they could produce crops. But a more powerful logic overcame such concerns. Cope purchased the Africans to

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[31] For rations issued to Africans, DTT, Sep 20, 1754.
[32] TTP, "Mr. Richard Beckford's Instructions."
[33] DTT, Jun 14, 1754; Sep 11, 1754; Jun 10, 1755. When a group of ten unnamed Africans came to Egypt on Jan 13, 1756, they spent two days husking corn and a week weeding and "filling carts with dung," and then entered the field gang. See DTT, Jan 13-20, 1756.
[34] DTT, Sep 11, 1754 ("put"). For the division of labor by age, see Sasha Turner, *Contested Bodies: Pregnancy, Childrearing, and Slavery in Jamaica* (Philadelphia, 2017), Chapter 7.
[35] For cooking pots, DTT, Aug 7, 1754. For dung baskets, DTT, Aug 21, 1754; Apr 17, Aug 11, Aug 20, 1755; DTT, Apr 20, 1756.

ramp up sugar production in an era of rising prices and to pay off his substantial debts—which only increased by borrowing to buy the twenty-five Africans.[36] If Africans were "inured to labour by degrees" their contribution would be in the future, when sugar prices might drop just as Cope's creditors came to collect for the cost of his captives. Given that most Jamaican planters were, by the late eighteenth century, similarly dependent on rising sugar prices to service often sizeable debts, the seasoning strategies employed by Thistlewood were likely commonplace on the island; few were the estate owners, like Beckford, who could afford to allow newly arrived Africans a period of rest and recuperation.[37] For all but the most affluent Jamaican planters, short-term profit motives overrode longer-term aspirations to treat Africans with "Benevolence" during their seasoning.

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Africans fiercely resisted Thistlewood's attempts to break them to plantation labor. Escape was the most common mode of opposition. Sixteen of the twenty-five Africans fled at least once between 1754 and 1760, fourteen of the seventeen males and two of the eight women.[38] Three Africans ran almost immediately: just five days after he arrived, for example, Quacoo went; nine days later, Quacoo's shipmates Abraham and Dover also fled.[39] More commonly, Africans fled between six weeks and three months after arrival, when they would have recovered their strength, familiarized themselves with the new environment, and experienced grinding labor. Runaways typically hid in the

[36] For Cope's indebtedness, see Burnard, *Mastery,* 51.
[37] Africans were not permitted a period of rest even on some of the largest Jamaican plantation. At the massive Golden Grove plantation, for example, captives were pushed into the fields almost immediately upon arrival because the estate's absentee owner demanded that sugar output be constantly increased. See, B. W. Higman, *Plantation Jamaica, 1750–1807: Capital and Control in a Colonial Economy* (Kingston, Jamaica, 2008), 137–46; Betty Wood and T. R. Clayton, "Slave Birth, Death and Disease on Golden Grove Plantation, Jamaica, 1765–1810," *Slavery & Abolition* 6:2 (Sep 1, 1985): 99–121.
[38] The reason for such a pronounced gendered difference is unclear. Historians have typically explained women's reluctance to run to family ties that bound them to the plantation. Given that the Africans were newcomers to Egypt, this did not apply. African gender norms, in which women were typically expected to perform agricultural labor, perhaps better explains the discrepancy; men fled because they did not want to perform work that they thought humiliating. See Jennifer L. Morgan, *Laboring Women: Reproduction and Gender in New World Slavery* (Philadelphia, 2004), 50-68.
[39] DTT, Sep 11, Sep 25, 1754.

woods and creeks surrounding Egypt and returned to forage for food, often with other fugitives.[40] Thistlewood successfully employed slaves to hunt runaways in exchange for rewards of rum or cash: escapees were typically dragged back to Egypt within a day or two.[41] Even so, eleven of the sixteen Africans who fled once did so repeatedly, and two men, Quaro and Quacoo, managed to make their permanent escape.[42]

Those Africans who remained imprisoned on Egypt refused to work and stole goods. After Nero had been on Egypt for almost two months, during which time he had run once, he told Thistlewood that he "will not work" and "threatened to cut his own throat." Two weeks later, Nero lost his cane knife and hoe, having probably thrown them away, a common strategy for Africans.[43] These were only the incidents that Thistlewood noticed; Africans, like other slaves, no doubt stopped work the moment that they were unsupervised. They also resorted to theft, usually to satiate their hunger, but also to frustrate Thistlewood. Several broke into corn fields and devoured unripe husks, apparently through desperation.[44] Africans also ate "young canes" for energy; shipmates Nero and Doll surreptitiously devoured a duck "feathers, guts and all."[45] Hunger was not the only motive for theft, however. Africans stole and then sold other poultry, Thistlewood's dog, and each other; on January 28, 1756, Achilles, a recently arrived captive, sold Doll, an African woman, for clothing,

[40] For runaways' locations, DTT May 1-2, 1755; Jun 28, 1756; Jul 26, 1756; Dec 1, 1756; Dec 4, 1756; Jun 23, 1757; Aug 26, 1760.
[41] For the recapture of runaway Africans, DTT, Aug 8, 1754; Jan 1, 1755; Apr 2, 1755; May 2, 1755; May 27, 1755; Jul 26, 1755; Aug 8, 1755; Sep 18, 1755; Oct 20, 1755; Dec 13, 1755; Mar 15, 1756; Jun 30, 1756; Jul 4, 1756; Jul 22, 1756; Aug 6, 1756; Oct 24, 1756; May 11, 1756; Nov 2, 1756; Dec 13, 1756; Dec 13, 1756; Aug 8, 1758; Aug 10, 1758; Mar 13, 1759; Jul 19, 1759; Oct 4, 1759; Aug 25, 1760; Nov 13, 1760.
[42] Quaro escaped on Oct 23, 1756 (DTT) and is not mentioned again. Quacoo left with a pass on Jul 28, 1760 (DTT). On Aug 26 (DTT), he was found in one of the provision grounds with other runaways but escaped. Thistlewood mentions him last on Sep 30, 1760 (DTT).
[43] For Nero's elopement, DTT, Jul 29, 1754. For his strike, DTT, Aug, 8, 1754 ("will not," "threatened"). For the loss of his tools, DTT, Aug 21, 1754. For others discarding tools, DTT, Aug 21, 1754; Mar 2, 1756; Oct 22, 1754.
[44] For corn eating, DTT, Jul 30, 1755; Oct 20, 1755; Aug 4, 1756; Jul 20, 1758.
[45] DTT, Aug 28, 1754.

tobacco, alcohol and a gun.[46] Africans purloined anything they could, both to fill their empty bellies and to accumulate property.[47]

Thistlewood punished resistance with a range of penalties. Nineteen Africans were lashed, the commonest punishment, in their first five years on Egypt, and fourteen people received repeated beatings. Flogging was one end of a spectrum that ratcheted up after each perceived transgression of the plantation code. Thistlewood did not always punish Africans the first time that they ran; on July 4, 1756, he forgave Quaw for running away because it was his "first offence."[48] After a second "offence," he typically whipped the person, chained them (often to other people), and only released them "upon promise of good behavior."[49] If they continued to flee, Thistlewood branded their faces and forced them to wear uncomfortable and humiliating "pot hooks," long and awkward metal rods that protruded from a neck collar.[50] When these measures did not suffice, Thistlewood flogged the captives and then rubbed them with salt pickle, lime juice and bird excrement.[51] Refusal to work resulted in immediate and harsh reprisal; when Nero stopped work, Thistlewood had him "stripped, whipped, gagged, and his hands tied behind his back, that the muskitoes and sand fleas might torment him to some purpose."[52]

Thistlewood reserved his most gruesome punishments for cane eaters. Like other Jamaican whites, he feared that hungry slaves would devour profits, and so he devised a particularly sickening punishment for cane eating: he "made Egypt [another slave] shit in [Derby's] mouth," a penalty

[46] For poultry theft, DTT, Jul 24, 1759. For Thistlewood's dog, DTT, Jan 8, 1758. For Doll's sale, DTT, Jan 28, 1756. Achilles was robbed of his loot on his return to Egypt, likely by another slave. Oddly, Thistlewood does not record who Doll was sold to, Achilles' punishment, nor any effort to track Doll down.
[47] For Jamaican whites' beliefs that Africans were inveterate thieves, see Long, *History,* II, 409.
[48] DTT, Jun 30, Jul 4, 1756.
[49] DTT, Aug 21, 1758.
[50] For chaining and pot hooks, May 13, 1756; Aug 10, 1756; Nov 8, 1756; Dec 14, 1756; Mar 13, 1759. For face branding, DTT, Aug 7, 1755; Jun 30, 1756.
[51] For "pickling," DTT, Jul 25, 1755; May 26, 1756; Jul 30, 1756; Nov 2, 1756; Dec 14, 1756; Aug 7, 1758.
[52] DTT, Aug 8, 1754.

thereafter known as "Derby's dose."[53] Derby would later be given the same punishment for cane eating, exacted by Hector;[54] and Hector would receive "Derby's dose" for the same "crime."[55] Historians have dwelled on this horrid penalty to illuminate Caribbean whites' sadism.[56] Yet there was a purpose to Derby's dose: Thistlewood sought to create an indelible association between eating excrement and consuming cane in the Africans' minds. Moreover, he only ever applied Derby's dose for cane eating; eating corn resulted in a whipping.[57] Sadistic though it was, Derby's dose fit at the far end of a long spectrum of punishments that was designed to curtail resistance, especially amongst Africans.

African women were physically punished, but not nearly as frequently as men. Of the two women who ran, neither was whipped, perhaps because it was only their first "infraction."[58] However, Thistlewood whipped six of the eight women for stealing corn, eating dirt, harboring runaways, and feigning illness.[59] None of the women were branded on the face, chained, or devoured by insects, like the men. Only one of the women, Phillis, was subjected to "Derby's dose" and "Hector's dose" (urination in the mouth), in both cases for eating cane.[60] Sexual violence, rather than the whip, was Thistlewood's weapon for breaking African women. Historians have painstakingly documented his sexual predation and found that he frequently raped enslaved women during his years on Egypt.[61] He took advantage of Africans' isolation and vulnerability: he forced himself on each of the eight

[53] DTT, Jan 28, 1756.
[54] DTT, May 26, 1756.
[55] DTT, Oct 5, 1756.
[56] Burnard writes that punishments like Derby's dose were "devised more to humiliate his slaves and demonstrate to his charges the gratuitous assertion of his total power than to correct them for what Thistlewood considered misdemeanors" (Burnard, *Mastery,* 261). See also Dawn P. Harris, *Punishing the Black Body; Marking Social and Racial Structures in Barbados and Jamaica* (Athens, 2017), 24.
[57] For Derby's dose, DTT, Jul 24, 1756; Jul 31, 1756; Oct 5, 1756; Nov 20, 1756. For whipping for corn eating, DTT, Oct 20, 1755.
[58] For the elopement of the two women, DTT, Sep 9-11, 1754; Jul 25, 1760.
[59] For stealing corn, DTT, Oct 20, 1755. For dirt eating, DTT, Dec 28, 1758. For harboring runaways, DTT, Jan 7, 1756. For feigning illness, DTT, May 16, 1755.
[60] DTT, Jul 24, Jul 31, 1756.
[61] Burnard, *Mastery,* 209-240.

women.[62] It was usually several months before he assaulted them, perhaps waiting until they had recovered from "yaws," a common ulcerous disease that whites erroneously thought to be venereal.[63] He raped healthy women soon after arrival, and most Africans were subjected to repeated assault; Rosanna was raped fourteen times in her first five years.[64]

That Jamaican whites like Thistlewood subjected enslaved people to sexual assault, whippings, and torture is not surprising. Jamaica was, as historians have ably demonstrated, akin to a vast prison camp in which whites brutalized and tortured enslaved people.[65] But historians have underestimated the degree to which unseasoned Africans were disproportionately targeted by whites. Africans ran away, refused to work, hungrily devoured crops, and stole more often than their seasoned counterparts, both to attempt escape and to resist white authority. In 1755, for example, Africans comprised almost half of the runaways, but only a quarter of Egypt's slaves; they suffered forty percent of the punishments. That Thistlewood's cruelest penalties were aimed at and named after Africans is also no coincidence. Whites devised awful chastisements, such as Derby's dose, because they wanted to terrorize Africans into accepting their authority. As we will see, they were largely successful in this endeavor.

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[62] For Thistlewood's assaults of African women, Sep 25, 1754; Oct 3, 1754; Nov 6, 1754; Nov 19, 1754; Nov 29, 1754; Dec 1, 1754; Dec 21, 1754; Jul 27, 1755; Aug 1, 1755; Aug 12, 1755; Nov 26, 1755; Jan 18, 1756; Feb 19, 1756; Mar 20, 1756; Apr 8, 1756; Jul 2, 1756; Oct 29, 1756; Aug 19, 1758; Sep 21, 1758; Nov 28, 1756; Dec 15, 1756; Jan 11, 1757; Jun 7, 1757; Dec 30, 1758; Jan 12, 1759; Apr 30, 1759; Jun 27, 1759; Jul 13, 1759; Aug 3, 1759; Aug 14, 1759; Sep 6, 1759; Oct 2, 1759; Nov 10, 1759; Sep 1, 1760.
[63] For yaws, Collins, *Practical Rules,* 412. Five of the eight African women spent time in the plantation hospital soon after their arrival at Egypt. See DTT, Jul 3, Jul 26, Jul 31, 1754; Aug 21, 1755.
[64] For example, Phillis and Quasheba both arrived on June 4, 1755, and were assaulted on Jul 27 and Aug 12, 1755 (DTT), respectively.
[65] Byrd, *Captives and Voyagers;* Trevor Burnard, *Jamaica in the Age of Revolution* (Philadelphia, 2020), 70-102.

Historians have compared the struggle between whites and enslaved people in Jamaica as a war.[66] This metaphor is particularly apt for Africans, who were brutally punished for openly resisting white authority. But as their seasoning progressed, they had to decide whether the fight was worth continuing. Runaways realized the futility of escape, and felt the harsh consequences of refusing to work, breaking their tools, and eating crops. They were simultaneously surrounded by seasoned slaves who possessed houses, families, property, and food. Jamaican whites hoped that Africans would see these benefits and, as Beckford observed, "reconcile" themselves to their "New Master."[67] In this way, Africans would become seasoned: people whose bodies had acclimatized to the Jamaican environment, and whose minds had been turned from resistance towards accommodation and even collaboration.

The story of Morris, who arrived on June 4, 1754, encapsulates how this system of punishments and rewards successfully turned some rebellious Africans into collaborators. Within six weeks of his arrival, Morris ran.[68] He spent much of the next year unsuccessfully trying to flee. In August 1755, after an almost three-month absence, Thistlewood branded him in the face, forced him to work in chains and locked him into pothooks.[69] Morris fled again—still wearing pothooks—two weeks later, but was recaptured and whipped; he would remain in pothooks for almost two months.[70] After his release from the chains, he apparently decided to survive slavery by finding several niches on Egypt, rather than running. In April 1758, he began growing and selling tamarinds; he even gave d a basket to Thistlewood.[71] Morris next proved his reliability by tracking down runaways, no doubt

[66] Burnard, *Mastery,* 137. See also, Vincent Brown, *Tacky's Revolt: The Story of an Atlantic Slave War* (Cambridge Mass., 2020), 17-43; Edward B. Rugemer, *Slave Law and the Politics of Resistance in the Early Atlantic World* (Cambridge Mass., 2018), 120-170.
[67] "Mr. Richard Beckford's Instructions," TTP.
[68] DTT, Aug 13, 1754.
[69] DTT, May 16, Aug 6-7, 1755.
[70] DTT, Aug 18, 26; Oct 16, 1755.
[71] DTT, Apr 16, 1758.

employing his knowledge of surrounding hiding places; in just six months, he captured four different fugitives.[72] Morris' collaboration apparently impressed Thistlewood, because he began to send him on errands off the plantation.[73] During his seasoning, Morris transformed from poacher to gamekeeper.

The tragic case of Derby, one of Morris' shipmates, illustrates, by contrast, how some Africans chose perpetual resistance over collaboration. Derby fled on July 21, 1755, just over a month after his arrival, but was caught three days later.[74] Thistlewood's reprisal was brutal: Derby was "given a good whipping and pickled well," and then was forced to wear pothooks for two weeks.[75] He was whipped again in October for "stealing corn" and then, in January 1756, was "accused of eating young canes" and given "Derby's dose."[76] He continued to run away, and, after being caught on March 16, 1755, was sullen, refused food and "does not care about whipping."[77] On August 4, Derby's short life on Egypt nearly ended when he was caught stealing corn and had his "ear, cheek and jaw almost cut off" by an enslaved watchman's machete.[78] He spent a period as a watchman himself, perhaps in recuperation, before he was pushed back into the field, where he tried to flee and was caught eating canes again, for which he received frequent beatings.[79] Derby refused to acquiesce to the plantation system, but he was horribly tortured, mutilated, and forced to perform hard labor as a result.

Upon witnessing the sad fates of resisters like Derby, some Africans opted for accommodation from the outset. Quamina, for example, arrived in September 1754 and, within a year, he had moved out of the field and instead cut fences—relatively light labor compared to sugar work.[80] Thistlewood

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[72] DTT, Jul 16, 23; Aug 14, 1759.
[73] DTT, Jan 3, 1760.
[74] DTT, Jul 21, 24, 1755.
[75] DTT, Jul 25, Aug 9, 1755.
[76] DTT, Oct 20, 1755; Jan 27, 1756; Jan 28, 1756. On May 26, 1756, Thistlewood caught Derby eating canes again and issued the same punishment (DTT).
[77] For Derby's elopements and strike, DTT Feb 2, 4, Mar 13, 15, 16, 1756..
[78] DTT, Aug 4, 1756.
[79] For Derby's time as a watchman, see DTT, Aug 7, 1758. For his escape attempts once back in the field, DTT, Nov 13, Dec 6, Dec 19, 1760. When Derby fled on Dec 6, he was recaptured by his shipmate Philip.
[80] DTT, Jul 21, Aug 8, 11, Dec 2-4, 8, 10, 1755, Feb 2-4, 1756.

next employed him carrying goods and letters, welcome escapes from the plantation prison.[81] In return for his perceived obedience, Quamina was never physically punished. Quamina's shipmate Quaw followed a similar trajectory. Although he ran away two years after coming to Egypt, he was forgiven by Thistlewood and, apparently, decided to reconcile himself to plantation life.[82] In December 1758, he began making ropes and then weaving dung baskets, skilled work that kept him out of the fields and perhaps enabled him to earn small sums.[83] Accommodation was evidently a strategy for surviving slavery that prevented Africans from being beaten and allowed them to escape arduous field work.

Africans who chose to remain on Egypt also formed relationships with other people to further insulate themselves against the horrors of plantation slavery. The case of Moll and Cobenna is particularly revealing of the strength and complexity of these bonds. Moll came in June 1754 and Cobenna three months later, and the two formed a relationship sometime thereafter. In December 1756, Cobenna had an affair with Lydde, an enslaved woman from an adjacent plantation. In a "Jealous" rage, Moll beat Lydde so badly that she had to be carried home; Moll next went to Cobenna's hut and hurled out his clothes and property, before "drown[ing]" herself "wilfully" in the river. Thistlewood opined that she must have killed herself because she thought "she had killed Lydde," indicating that the two women may have been close friends.[84] That night, Cobenna buried his former partner in distress; Thistlewood feared that Cobenna would kill himself through grief. Cobenna's subsequent romantic entanglements demonstrate the ways that Africans increasingly joined the slave community as their seasoning wore on. Sometime before April 1757, Cobenna formed a new relationship with Rosanna, an African who had arrived in June 1755; Rosanna had an affair with London, one of Egypt's other slaves, and was caught by Cobenna, who gave London "a good

[81] DTT, Jul 8, 11-12, 22, Aug 1-2, 5, 16, Oct 17-19, 1757, Jun 3, 1758.
[82] DTT, Jul 4, 1756.
[83] DTT, Dec 11-13, 15-16, 18-22, 28-29, 1758.
[84] DTT, Dec 8 ("Jealous," "drowned wilfully"), 9 ("she had"), 1756.

Thumping."[85] Although Thistlewood is largely silent about other relationships, he records Violet and Cloe, two of Moll's surviving shipmates, having children, indicating that they also perhaps formed unions with enslaved men; a third woman, Quasheba, found an enslaved husband by 1759.[86] Africans thus sought to reconstruct their shattered social and family lives during their seasoning.

Five of the twenty-five Africans perished before they could enmesh themselves in the slave community, however.[87] The deaths of a fifth of the Africans matches the findings of historians, who have discovered that deaths "averaged about 15 or 20 per cent" within three years of arrival.[88] Three of the five Africans perished within six months of their arrival, and all three arrived in Jamaica aboard the same slave ship, indicating that historians are right to attribute high death rates during seasoning to lingering illnesses contracted during the Middle Passage and exposure to a new disease environment. Egypt's Africans certainly suffered from diseases: all but four were confined to the plantation hospital within a year of their arrival, many spent long periods laid up, and disease claimed the lives of four of the five people who perished; Moll drowned herself after her dispute with Lydde. Even so, the gendered nature of planters' seasoning strategies—particularly the terrible punishments meted out to men—must have contributed to the Africans' deaths, as all but one of the five who perished were men. Those who survived the seasoning still possessed physical and mental scars, however. Most were pock-marked from "yaws," "the clap," and "pox."[89] All but six bore whipping scars, four brands on their cheeks, and one—Derby—was disfigured. Every one of the twenty-five

[85] DTT, Apr 2, 1757.
[86] For Violet's son, DTT, Oct 24, 1755. In March 1760, Violet "ma[de] a match" with Thistlewood's slave Lincoln. Within a week of commencing their relationship, she was "caught in fact" with Ambo. See DTT, Mar 23, 30, 1760. For Cloe's daughter, DTT, Jul 16, 1758.
[87] For the deaths of the five Africans, DTT, Oct 8, 1754 (Nero); Dec 17, 1754 (Adam); Dec 9, 1756 (Moll); Aug 11, 1760 (Toby); Sept 21, 1760 (Hector).
[88] J. R. Ward, *British West Indian Slavery, 1750-1834: The Process of Amelioration* (Oxford, 1988), 125; 82.
[89] For yaws see footnote 63. For "the clap," DTT, Nov 12, 1754, Apr 16, 1755, May 2, 1755, Jul 2, 1759. For "pox," DTT, Sept 27, 1754.

Africans was thus transformed by their seasoning, and the survivors of the traumatic process would carry their mental and physical wounds for the remainder of their lives on Egypt.

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Thistlewood did not act with "Justice & Benevolence" towards the twenty-five people whom he seasoned between 1754 and 1760, as Richard Beckford had advised in his plantation manual. Instead, he pushed traumatized and weakened Africans immediately into the fields; beat, tortured, and raped them to quell their resistance; and sought to transform them into collaborators. He pursued Long's brutal management regime, instead of Beckford's more lenient policy, because it was highly effective: Thistlewood successfully forced Africans to produce sugar, while simultaneously tamping down potential resistance and rebellion. Given the effectiveness of this seasoning program, it was almost certainly employed by planters elsewhere in Jamaica and the wider British Caribbean, especially by planters who, like Egypt's owner, were short of labor and saddled with debts. The twenty-five Africans suffered the terrible consequences of this regime. They endured hunger, isolation, and confusion as they were forcibly integrated into an alien slave community that was socially divided and meant to be self-sufficient in food. Many Africans, especially men, tried to flee or fight back during this disorienting and terrifying period. Faced with the difficulty of escape and the consequences of resistance, many gave up and accommodated themselves to the plantation system. Five of the twenty-five Africans perished, two escaped, and one was sold, but the seventeen others also metaphorically died and were reborn as "seasoned slaves"—people whose bodies and minds had been altered by their seasoning.

Focusing on these twenty-five individuals therefore reveals seasoning to be a distinct phase of enslavement that deserves much more sustained scholarly attention if we want to fully grasp the African experience of enslavement. Enslavers treated Africans in radically different ways to seasoned

and creole slaves, and Africans consequently had very different experiences in the Americas. They had to learn alien plantation ways, resisted more openly, suffered the most imaginative punishments, and had to enmesh themselves in existing slave communities. Given these obvious differences, historians need to distinguish between seasoned and unseasoned enslaved people in future studies of plantation slavery. Rather than concentrating on the often-ignored advice given by Beckford and other improving planters, attention needs to be given to the individual experiences of the Africans who endured the seasoning. In so doing, we will be able to better understand how millions of lonely, traumatized, and rebellious Africans were forcibly transformed into American slaves.

**Table 1: Twenty-Five Africans seasoned on Egypt Plantation, c. June 1754- June 1755**

| | | Days between first arrival and… (# of incidents to 1760) | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Name** | **Age/Sex** | **… work** | **…runaway** | **…punishment** | **…sexual assault** | **Fate on Dec 31, 1760** |
| *Arrived May 25, 1754* | | | | | | |
| Hector | Man | 19 | 20 (7) | 228 (8) | | **Dead**: September 21, 1760 |
| *Arrived June 13, 1754* | | | | | | |
| Adam | Man | 1 | 5 (3) | 55 (1) | | **Dead**: December 17, 1754 |
| Nero | Man | 1 | 45 (1) | 56 (2) | | **Dead**: October 8, 1754 |
| Morris | Man | 1 | 61 (7) | 348 (3) | | Alive |
| Moll | Woman | 1 | | | 169 (3) | **Dead**: December 8, 1754 |
| Melia | Woman | 1 | | | 159 (1) | Alive |
| Violet | Woman | 1 | | 338 (2) | 104 (6) | Alive |
| Doll | Woman | 1 | 18 (1) | 27 (2) | 171 (2) | **Sold**: January 28, 1756 |
| Cloe | Woman | 1 | 88 (1) | 2392 (1) | 2296 (1) | Alive |
| *Arrived September 11, 1754* | | | | | | |
| Cobenna | Man | 2 | 310 (2) | 320 (2) | | Alive |
| Quacoo | Man | 2 | 322 (14) | 364 (18) | | **Escaped**: September 30, 1760 |
| Quaw | Man | 2 | 660 (4) | | | Alive |
| Quamina | Man | 2 | | | | Alive |
| Abraham | Boy | 2 | 16 (1) | 1565 (7) | | Alive |
| Dover | Boy | 2 | 16 (1) | 1445 (3) | | Alive |
| *Arrived June 4, 1755* | | | | | | |
| Derby | Man | 6 | 47 (4) | 51 (10) | | Alive |
| Philip | Man | 6 | 50 (4) | 51 (4) | | Alive |
| Charles | Man | 6 | 61 (7) | 77 (3) | | Alive |
| Quaro | Man | 6 | 24 (2) | 24 (1) | | **Escaped**: October 23, 1756 |
| Toby | Man | 6 | 1161 (2) | 1160 (1) | | **Dead**: August 11, 1760 |
| Johnie | Man | 6 | | | | Alive |
| Primus | Man | 6 | | | | Alive |
| Quasheba | Woman | 6 | | 34 (2) | 69 (7) | Alive |
| Phillis | Woman | 6 | | 416 (2) | 53 (3) | Alive |
| Roseanna | Woman | 6 | | 1303 (1) | 228 (14) | Alive |

***Sources:*** DTT, 1754-1760.