

## DEPRIVATION OF HUMAN RIGHTS, LIBERTIES, INTEGRITY, AND DIGNITY: SLAVERY IN PUERTO RICO, 19<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY. A HELL FOR CHILDREN

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### Abstract

During the 19<sup>th</sup> Century the people of Puerto Rico were living basically under the arbitrary attitude of men and not under the rule of law. The despotism or autocratic position of the governors was more powerful than the law. Our judicial system existed in a placid ignorance of human rights and protective legislation, especially for slaves, primarily the children. Thus, the law, in general, lost its sense of majesty or grandeur or justice; it became variable, capricious, arbitrary, senseless: dead. It was not, anymore, a principle for the protection of the common individuals: as a rule of conduct or action established by custom or laid down by a governing authority. Instead, the people and the governing body saw the law not only as an instrument of power and control, but also, of fear and oppression. The deprivation of human rights, liberties, integrity and dignity of children slaves, who were the most affected, continued up to 1873, when the abolition of slavery was finally declared in Puerto Rico,

**Keywords** Slaves' legislation, fear and oppression, human rights, children slaves,

### INTRODUCTION

As the Bible states on slavery in the Old Testament,<sup>2</sup> authorizing Jews to buy and keep “the children of strangers” as “your bondsmen forever”, and your “offsprings shall inherit them”. In general, however, 19<sup>th</sup> Century writers neutralized the force of precedent either by denying the significance of ancient slavery in the Bible or by relegating the subject to a purely moral sphere. Both strategies served to isolate modern slavery as a monstrous aberration, unrelated to the central trends of history or to the

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<sup>2</sup> Bible, Old Testament, “Leviticus, 25<sup>th</sup> Chapter, 45-46”.

larger patterns of juridical, economic and political life.<sup>3</sup> The North (U.S.) arguments expressed on the moral issue of slavery: “Christianity demands slavery’s end”, invoking the blessings of the Christian God, although the South arguments were the opposite.<sup>4</sup> In fact, slaving affected all groups, including children, since ancient times.

On the other hand, the Spanish scholar and philosopher Ginés de Sepúlveda in 1550, made the famous distinction between those who were born masters and those born slaves (derived from Aristotle’s statement): “Those [slaves], therefore, who are as much inferior to others as are the body to the soul and beasts to men, are by nature slaves.” Believing that hierarchy, not equality, is the natural state of human society, as superiority to inferiority, children to adults, and slaves to master, thus stating that “the slave is an intrinsically inferior being, since he lacks... the use of reason, which affords the very definition of man...”<sup>5</sup>

During the 16<sup>th</sup> Century, the Spanish friar Bartolomé de las Casas, before writing *The History of the Indies*, as defender of the Indians in America against enslavement by the Spanish conquerors, did not have the same attitude toward Indians and blacks: he consented that the blacks, but not the former, be reduced to slavery. We must remember that enslavement of blacks was an acknowledged phenomenon at the time, whereas that of the Indians was beginning.

Even though, contradictory as might be to the practice of slavery during that time, evidently, the overall consciousness of the human rights and liberties of men existed. Since the 16<sup>th</sup> Century in Spain, including Portugal as one of its kingdoms, the declaration of the equality of men was proclaimed by the Spanish Crown in the name of the Christian religion (Catholic Church) after the arrival of Columbus in America.<sup>6</sup> In addition, the Laws of the Indies (*Leyes de Indias*) for the American Colonies were compiled by the Spanish which stated on the “administration of justice” and “equality for all”, to be as “impartial, and with equanimity to all kinds of races and conditions of

<sup>3</sup> Davis, David Brion, *Slavery and Human Progress*. New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984, 112.

<sup>4</sup> Douthat, Ross, “The North, the South, and God”. Book review: *Upon the Altar of a Nation: A Moral History of the Civil War*. Policy Review, February and March 2006, No. 135, Hoover Institution, Stanford University, Stanford, California. Stout, Harry S., *Upon the Altar of a Nation: A Moral History of the Civil War*. New York, Viking Press, 2003.

<sup>5</sup> Todorov, Tzvetan, *The Conquest of America: The Question of the Other*. Norman, University of Oklahoma Press, 1999, 152-3, 161.

<sup>6</sup> Todorov, *ibid.*, 162.

men”.<sup>7</sup> In the 17<sup>th</sup> Century, in England, the Bill of Rights was carried out to protect the people’s rights of life and liberty; and in the Netherlands (Dutch), at the the Golden Age Period, the most advanced ideas and attitudes helped to shape a new and modern world. Then, during the 18<sup>th</sup> Century, in the independent North American Colonies, the Constitution of the United States (1787) was set to protect individual freedom defending life and liberty; in France, The Declaration of the Rights of Man (1789) was issued on behalf of the rights as liberty, security, and “resistance to oppression”. The first Constitution of Spain in 1812, one of the greatest liberal texts of history, established national sovereignty, constitutional monarchy, universal suffrage, and freedom of the press.

## SLAVERY

The institution and practice of slavery had been on the African continent for thousands of years a condition of servitude, and also of cruelty. The slave trade could not have been successful without the consent of the African elites: their criminal participation in the trade of capturing, kidnapping, enslaving and exiling their people in chains to the New World. The Portuguese, Spanish, Dutch, English and French slave traders were brutal, but they were not working alone, many Africans were “complicit in this victimization”:<sup>8</sup> it was a plot carried out by a group or alliance rather than an individual or isolated act. There were an infinite number of educated and conscious Africans of the upper classes and business people, intentionally driven by the desire and ambition to acquire commodities and gain more wealth. It was a tacit agreement between Europeans and Africans, who together performed an abominable act against the morals of a people that had as a consequence, that a population was “robbed of its

<sup>7</sup> Altamira y Crevea, Rafael, *Análisis de la Recopilación de las Leyes de Indias de 1680*. Buenos Aires: Instituto de Historia del Derecho Argentino, 1941, 431-2.

García Gallo, Concepción, “Sobre el ordenamiento jurídico de la esclavitud en las Indias Españolas”. *Anuario de Historia del Derecho Español*, 50, Madrid 1980, 1005-1038.

<sup>8</sup> Antrim, Zayde, “Confronting the Legacy of the African Slave Trade”, and Kemp, Renee, “An Apology in Ghana: Chiefs Offer Atonement for Forefathers’ Support of the Kidnappings of People for the Slave Trade”. *The Slave Kingdoms Episode*, 2000, [www.pbs.org](http://www.pbs.org).

elemental dignity by slavery”.<sup>9</sup> It was a joining or acting together, as by a sinister design: a conspiracy that devastated a people, including children, since everything conspired toward their abuse. In fact, it was an act of human exploitation, an odious crime, that history and humanity are prohibited to forget.

Domestic slave ownership as well as domestic and international slave trade in Western Africa preceded the late 15<sup>th</sup> Century origins of the Atlantic slave trade. Slavery was an established institution in West Africa before European traders arrived. Africans were involved in a trans-Saharan trade in slaves along these routes and were able to effectively supply the European demand for slaves. Enslavement was most often a byproduct of local warfare, kidnapping or the manipulation of religious and judicial institutions. Military, political, and religious authorities within West Africa determined who controlled access to the Atlantic slave trade. Indeed, African elites benefited from the enslavement of their rivals, their enemies, the poor, and other culturally foreign groups from the 15<sup>th</sup> to the 19<sup>th</sup> Centuries. Class, language, religion, gender, age, ethnicity and power divided Africans; and it was along these lines that certain Africans participated in the slave trade.<sup>10</sup>

Pre-colonial empires’ slave ports flourished and accumulated enormous wealth and power as a result of the trade of their African peers. The sources of slaves in Africa moved gradually southwards to the Sahara Desert. The first slaves came chiefly from Senegambia, the Upper Guinea Coast (from modern Guinea – Bissau to Liberia), Congo, and Angola (an important supplier throughout the trade). In the mid-of the 17<sup>th</sup> Century the slaves came from the Gold Coast and the Bight of Benin (including the Dahomey and Yoruba Kingdoms), and during the 18<sup>th</sup> Century expansion of the trade, they were mainly from the Bight of Biafra and Mozambique.<sup>11</sup>

Europeans relied on the African rulers and members of the mercantile classes from whom they got access to the things they wanted. The African elites took advantage of this control and used it to their profit by enslaving and selling Africans to European

<sup>9</sup> Lewis, Gordon K., *Main Currents in Caribbean Thought, The Historic Evolution of Caribbean Society in Its Ideological Aspects, 1492-1900*. Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1983, 173.

<sup>10</sup> Curtin, Philip D., *The Atlantic Slave Trade, A Census*. Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1975; Antrim, op. cit.

<sup>11</sup> Curtin, Philip D., *Economic Change in Pre-colonial Africa: Senegambia in the Era of the Slave Trade*. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1975.

traders. At the beginning it was gold, later slaves. The Gold Coast, as it became known, was soon a center of the worldwide trade in gold, drawing fleets of European merchants' ships laden with cargoes of cloth, metal-ware, firearms and liquor. The Portuguese, Danish, Dutch and English in turn erected coastal fortifications to safeguard their trading interests. Eventually thick-walled chambers in these forts were housing an even more lucrative export: chained captives awaiting shipment to the Americas.<sup>12</sup>

Therefore, it was mostly African coastal chiefs and merchants who controlled the means of the coast and river navigation, under whose authority and to whose advantage the Atlantic trade was conducted,<sup>13</sup> permitting the exodus of millions of slaves in the course of five centuries. Thus, America became the great market where African slavery most prospered under European rule and pursued the height of its power. Doubtlessly, Africa sagaciously profited from selling its people into the slave trade, through monarchs and traders who gained in the capture or transportation of them.

By 1770 the slave raids had depopulated whole regions in West Africa, and the supply of slaves was so reduced, that even the demand for replacements could not be met, so their prices went upward and the cost of slaves at some of the African stations increased by more than 100 percent. The scarcity of slaves in Africa affected slave imports from the West Indies to North America. But the decline of the overseas trade did not affect the internal traffic carried on in every colony, British or Spanish.<sup>14</sup> Then by 1807 the areas of the Bight of Biafra, Angola, and Mozambique supplied over 80% of British and French slave exports and virtually all the Portuguese trade.<sup>15</sup>

Although, in some African societies slavery systems designed to servitude, the slaves gradually acquired some rights, and their children rarely be sold. In others, slavery became more like indentured servitude, in that the slaves retained some rights, and children born to slaves would be freed when they came to adult age, or stayed as apprentices, sometimes for an indefinite time. In contrast, slaves taken by Europeans

<sup>12</sup> Stewart, Doug, *West African Gold, Out of the Ordinary*. Washington D.C.: Smithsonian, December 2005, vol. 36, num. 9, 88-93.

<sup>13</sup> Curtin, Philip D., *African History, From Earliest Times To Independence*. London and New York: Longman, 1990, 182-211; Antrim, op.cit.

<sup>14</sup> McManus, Edgar J., *Black Bondage in the North*. Syracuse, New York: Syracuse University Press, 1973, 23-24.

<sup>15</sup> Klein, Herbert S., *African Slavery in Latin America and the Caribbean*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1986, 132. Klein, Herbert S., *The Middle Passage: Comparative Studies in the Atlantic Slave Trade*. New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1978.

legally were a thing that could be moved, property or chattel that could be disposed, bought, sold, bartered, pawned, bequeathed, inherited, or given as a prize or gift. Nevertheless, in both cases, in Europe and in America, slaves even though considered human beings, were property completely deprived of their rights.<sup>16</sup> The time of slavery was perpetual; children of slaves would, by inheritance or enslavement by birth, also be slaves. Precisely, enslavement reduced the other to the status of an object.<sup>17</sup>

Children born to a male slave and a free woman were free, while those of a free man and a slave woman became the property of the owner. Status followed matrilineal descent, but in some cases physical appearance made all the difference. Then the state courts had to decide who would be treated as a white and who would be treated as black. This was crucial, because negroes were presumed slaves<sup>18</sup>. In testaments and estate accounts slaves were classified as chattels in the same manner as tools, household goods, and other personal property. Beyond question, slavery was a pervasive institution in all occupations and slave groups in the sugar plantation that invaded even childhood.

The slave trade became the most profitable business during the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> Century. In the middle of the 18<sup>th</sup> Century, the value of the French trade with the Caribbean was about a third of the total French foreign and colonial trade. For the British, 10 to 20 percent of all foreign and colonial trade was with the Caribbean and Africa. The equivalent quantities may have been even higher for the North American colonies. The revocation of the treaty *Asiento de negros* in 1750, engaged between Britain and Spain in 1713 for a monopoly supply of slaves (4,800 a year) to the Spanish American colonies, brought its end into the Northern market. With the Spanish colonies closed to English traders, a flood of low-priced Africans arrived the English colonies, caused that the wholesale price declined by about 50 percent.<sup>19</sup> In South America and the Caribbean, the Portuguese and Spanish colonies were also drawn in as

<sup>16</sup> Dougnac Rodríguez, Antonio, *Manual de Historia del Derecho Indiano*, 2<sup>da</sup> edición. México: Universidad Nacional de México, 1988, 286; Levaggi, Abelardo, "La condición jurídica del esclavo en la época hispánica". *Revista de Historia del Derecho*, núm. 1, Buenos Aires, 1973, 83-ss.

<sup>17</sup> Todorov, op. cit., 175.

<sup>18</sup> McManus, op. cit., 70.

<sup>19</sup> McManus, op. cit., 22.

providers of goods throughout the system, for buying an unlimited number of slaves from the African coast until late in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century, for Cuba, Puerto Rico and Brazil.<sup>20</sup>

“The plantation complex, the economic, social, and political network that controlled the plantation”, as affirmed by Philip Curtin, made possible the principal force behind the Atlantic slave trade, the largest intercontinental migration before the 19<sup>th</sup> Century”.<sup>21</sup> Immigration has had its own contradictions: many had been propelled by need, others motivated by ambition, yet others by persecution, and others, like slaves, were forced or taken away from their countries; for the latter there was no longer a place to return. The Atlantic slave trade moved Europeans into Africa and tropical America at enormous cost of life; it moved Africans to America at even greater costs.<sup>22</sup> During the period that the trade was in vigor, 1450-1888, at least fifteen millions of Africans were forcibly captured and transported to the New World. This was accomplished with a possible mortality loss on the slaves of between 13 and 33 percent, based on a deliberately conservative estimate that comprised an undiscovered number of children. Certainly, it was only in the 1840s, that more Europeans than Africans crossed the Atlantic as migrants to the Americas.<sup>23</sup>

Eventually Northern United States had a powerful and important trade with the Caribbean region, including Puerto Rico, especially during the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> Century, selling and delivering slaves from Africa for the production of sugar and buying the sugar for its consumption.<sup>24</sup> The Northern cities that were mainly in this business with Puerto Rico were New York, Boston and Baltimore, with North American slave traders living in Puerto Rico, connected with financiers and shippers of Liverpool (U.K.).<sup>25</sup> New York was the second city holding most of the slaves in the 18<sup>th</sup> Century, and accounted

<sup>20</sup> Curtin, Philip D, *The Rise and Fall of the Plantation Complex, Essays in Atlantic History*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990, 150.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

<sup>22</sup> Curtin, op. cit. *The Atlantic Slave Trade*, 170-183, 191.

<sup>23</sup> Curtin, op. cit., *The Rise and Fall*, 142.

<sup>24</sup> Foner, Philip, *Business and Slavery: The New York Merchants and the Irrepressible Conflict*. New York: Russel and Russel, 1941. Katz, William, *Eyewitness: A Living Documentary of the African American Contribution to American History*. New York: Tochstone, 1995.

<sup>25</sup> Pérez Vega, Ivette, “Las oleadas de inmigración en el sur de Puerto Rico: Las sociedades mercantiles creadas en Ponce (1816-1830)”. *Disertación Doctoral: Universidad de Valladolid, España*, 1986. Publicarse: Ediciones Puerto, San Juan, Puerto Rico. Cap. II, 1-47, Cap. III. AGPR, FGE, Extranjeros, c. 89, ent. 28. Sonneson, Birgit, “Puerto Rico’s Commerce, 1835-1865: From Regional to World Wide Market Relations”. *Doctoral Thesis*, New York, New York University, 1985.

for 20% of its population, and 40% of its households owned slaves. Certainly, there must have been a robust number of children and youth in New York City. Since 1799 the New York legislature passed the first act of gradual emancipation that freed the unborn children of slaves on their 28<sup>th</sup> birthday. The slave trade was to be prohibited in 1808 in the North, but it continued. It must be present that even after New York abolished slavery in 1827 the business of the city was tied to the slave trade. The status of the children was clear: Children born to men and women owned by different persons became the property of the mother's owner. In the same manner, slave women relegated their children to a life of bondage, since slavery in the United States was an inherited condition. Children belonged to slave holders for life even if their mothers became free after childbirth.<sup>26</sup>

The slave society in America at the time was defined by relations of intra-national domination: if the slaves were suspended outside the sphere of conflict between colonialism and imperialism or if the motivating force for their existence was not class formation or class struggle, but the unitary experience of national oppression. Then, what else could a slave express or narrate but that national oppression. That national oppression or subjugation became a personal oppression and very difficult by the slave to narrate or talk about, only by his/her songs and dances.

It is difficult to find data on child slaves. There is general data on children in general studies of slavery, but for specific data you have to go deep in other records. Resources for such a study must be searched out from documents and manuscripts, as letters, importations records, trades in notarial protocols (sales, purchases, exchanges of slaves), contracts as leases, loans, hires, inheritances and testaments, manumissions, emancipations by owners, and redemptions of slaves. Other helpful documents are appraisals, inventories, auctions, confiscations, broadside advertisement of runaway or fugitive slaves and compensations, newspapers, government circulars, scholarly journals, and other printed material; also, theses and dissertations. In addition, censuses, court, historical, and parochial records, birth and death records. Another interesting material are the published sources as books along with unpublished

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<sup>26</sup> Harris, Leslie M., *In the Shadow of Slavery: African Americans in New York City, 1626-1863*. Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 2003, 153.



material, as objects, produced by children, diaries, plantation and merchants records, and ledger books of shipping voyages. Not the same and worthy are travelers and observers writings on social, economic, and political conditions in America. Prints and photographs are very valuable, and also, slave narratives. But in Puerto Rico, we do not have slave narratives, as in the U.S.<sup>27</sup>

In spite of all these resources, few historians have stressed enslavement of children. Children have received little attention because they, more than other group of slaves, were, as has been said, “silent and invisible”. This population did not write or express their feelings to others, and was in general ignored by others, including their owners and families. “To be sure, enslaved 19<sup>th</sup> Century children and youth experiences, with separations, terror, misery and despair, reduced them to children without childhoods”.<sup>28</sup> The fact that many of them were imported illegally and sold on cash-basis makes it harder to be found in primary data records.

## PUERTO RICO

The Caribbean island of Puerto Rico at the beginning of the 19th Century was the poorest of the Spanish Colonies, compared to other American Colonies, as Mexico or Perú. It did not have sufficient population (150,000), enough people interested in agriculture (especially sugar production), laborers, money, support of the government to evolve and progress. There was a lack of currency because of the definite suspension of the Situado to Puerto Rico, the public money as an allotment share given by Mexico, the richest colony, to support the island’s government subsistence.<sup>29</sup> Proprietors of land or small haciendas wanted to sell them to get specie to invest in commerce, a more productive activity. The peninsulares (emigrants from Spain), who were in Puerto Rico before 1815, were chiefly urban people not interested in agriculture, but who dealt in

<sup>27</sup> Born in Slavery: Slaves Narratives from the Federal Writers Project, 1936-1938. Manuscripts and Prints and Photographs Division, Library of the Congress, Washington, D.C.

<sup>28</sup> King, Wilma, *Stolen Childhood, Slave Youth in 19<sup>th</sup> Century America*. Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1995.

<sup>29</sup> Szásdi, Adam, “Credit-Without Banking In Early Nineteenth Century Puerto Rico”. *The Americas*, vol. XIX, Num. 2, Washington, Academy of American Franciscan History, Oct. 1962. Cruz de Arrigoitia, José, “El Situado Mexicano: origen y desarrollo en Puerto Rico durante los años 1582-1599”. Tesis de Maestría. Depto de Historia, Universidad de Puerto Rico, Recinto de Río Piedras, Río Piedras, Puerto Rico, 1984.

commerce - legal or illegal. The Island had been surviving for a long time by an illicit market with the Europeans (mainly French), since the Spanish Crown had been struggling with serious internal (invasion of France by Napoleon) and external problems with the American Colonies rebellions.<sup>30</sup>

Early in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century Puerto Rico became the asylum for the St. Domingue (French colony) and Spanish emigrés of the island of Santo Domingo, French settlers and other foreigners from all over America and even Europe; and for anyone who wanted a refuge: soldiers, ex-prisoners, public employees, haciendas administrators, widows, run-away slaves, freed-slaves.

The Constitution of 1812, the first promulgated for Spain and its ultramarine territories by the Crown, declared that the people of Puerto Rico would be Spanish citizens, except the slaves.<sup>31</sup> The ordinance endured only two years, up to 1814, when the King proclaimed again his absolute governing powers. The next Constitution lasted from 1820 to 1823 and, later, others were issued in 1837 and in 1845; then, additional ones in 1869, and in 1876, for the same reasons as the previous ones.

The statute Cédula de Gracias of 1815 established the Regulations for Promoting the Population, Commerce, Industry and Agriculture of the Island of Puerto Rico granted by Spain.<sup>32</sup> It was the instrument that the Crown used to solve part of its problems in America and Spain. It made the Island a desirable place for immigrants and exiles, especially realistas (favoring the Spanish Crown), who were escaping from the Spanish revolutions in America (1808-1826) and Spain (1808-1814). The decree permitted the entrance of foreigners and a considerable number of unemployed people, particularly Catalan laborers, small farmers from the Canary Islands, and workers from other regions of the Península (Spain). All were welcome in Puerto Rico as long as they would declare they were Catholics. After five years of establishment, the newcomers could become Spanish citizens. Then, they could engage in commerce and

<sup>30</sup> Morales Carrión, Arturo, *Puerto Rico and the Non-Hispanic Caribbean: A Study in the Decline of Spanish Exclusivism*. Río Piedras, University of Puerto Rico Press, 1952.

<sup>31</sup> Díaz Melián, Mafalda Victoria, "La condición jurídica y social del Negro en Puerto Rico a través de las Actas del Cabildo de San Juan Bautista de Puerto Rico (1775-1810)", en RChHD, núm. 12, Santiago de Chile, 1986, 277 y ss.

<sup>32</sup> Coll y Toste, Cayetano, *Boletín Histórico de Puerto Rico*, 14 tomos, San Juan, Tip. Cantero y Fernández Cía, 1914. Cédula de Gracias, Vol. 1, 181-2, 297-304; Establecimiento de colonos extranjeros, Vol. I, 304-7.

own ships. If they wanted to leave the territory after that time, they could take with them all their investments and profits; if they died the immediate relative could claim their belongings. In its essence, the Cédula favored mainly the wealthy and ambitious foreigners. The following words by the English traveler George Coggeshall visiting Puerto Rico confirm this statement: "Spain has also fostered and encouraged the slave-trade and, in a word, has granted every facility in its power to induce enterprising strangers to come here, to enrich themselves, and consequently to augment government revenue." "That from the increasing luxury [wealth] of this country, the advance of sugar keeps pace with the advance of slaves".<sup>33</sup> So, the Spanish government gave strong official backing to sugar production, slavery, and slave trade. Official policy toward slavery was clearly revealed in the declaration of the Slave Code of 1826 or Reglamento de Esclavos de 1826, regulating the ownership of slaves and their rights and recognizing slavery as a legal institution.<sup>34</sup> Slaves had some attributes of legal personality. They could own property, and these properties did not belong to their masters. They could receive and bequeath legacies, and work for their own benefit during their free time. The Slave Code in part protected blacks against cruel and abusive treatment. Since brutality or deprivation could make slaves dangerous to the community, the law imposed certain obligations on the owners. Because a large proportion of the slaves were skilled workers, the self-interest of the owners laid down a sensible approach to discipline. Slaves were permitted to report cases of maltreatment or neglect to the legal authorities through an assignee or síndico named by the state civil courts. But, the majority of them, did not know their rights and the owners didn't tell them. The owners were forbidden to abandon slaves who had become too old or sick to be of further service.

## IMMIGRATION – SOUTHERN COAST OF THE ISLAND

<sup>33</sup> Coggeshall, George, *Thirty Six Voyages to Various Parts of the World Made Between 1799 to 1841*. New York, Putman Press, 1858 edition, 49, 525-526.

<sup>34</sup> "Reglamento sobre los Esclavos de 1826": "Reglamento sobre la educación, trato y ocupaciones que deben dar a sus esclavos los dueños y mayordomos en esta Isla, 12 de agosto de 1826", en *El Proceso Abolicionista en Puerto Rico: Documentos para su estudio*, 2 vols. Vol. II: Proceso y efectos de la Abolición, Doc. 179, 103-112. Publicación del Centro de Investigaciones Históricas, Facultad de Humanidades, Universidad de Puerto Rico e Instituto de Cultura Puertorriqueña, San Juan, 1978 (*Proceso Abolicionista en Puerto Rico*, Vol. II, "Reglamento Esclavos", Doc. 179, 103-112).

The Cédula or Decree of 1789 was issued to liberalize the slave trade in Spain and its colonies. It was not until this year that a formal code dealing with the negro slave was promulgated by the Crown influenced by the religious doctrine of the equality of men in the sight of God. But this new code, as recognized by the preamble itself, is merely a summary of the ancient and traditional Spanish law that came to govern the position of the slave; his position was covered by isolated cédulas dealing with special problems.<sup>35</sup>

The Cédula de Gracias de 1815, also, permitted the introduction of a respectable number of slaves, openly stimulating a trade without limits in the Island, principally in the city of Ponce on the southern coast of Puerto Rico. It allowed 15 years free of taxation on slaves introduced by immigrants (foreigners and peninsulares) at the moment of their entrance in the country.<sup>36</sup>

Research on the introduction and sale of slaves in Ponce from 1815 to 1830 showed that Spanish Crown policy of taxation on importing and trading slaves in the city was very lax.<sup>37</sup> It was not complied by the local government, the people of the Island, or outsiders. Anyone could come to the port of Ponce and sell slaves. It was an open rampant market! The situation is evident in the government's interest in supplying labor for the production of sugar, the "white gold", which made possible the development of the Island. Without slaves, "black gold", there could be no sugar or development; nor there could be sugar without free immigrants: entrepreneurs or investors. This was the Crown's principal concern.

Immigrants (Spanish citizens, non-citizens, residents, foreigners) from Tierra Firme (Venezuela) would bring their slaves to Puerto Rico and also, the ones belonging to other people, since the country was in an upheaval; fearful that slavery in Venezuela was coming to an end. Many slaves after their arrival with the master were immediately sold at the port because the settlers urgently needed the currency to start a new life on

<sup>35</sup> Tannenbaum, Frank, *Slave and Citizen*. Boston: Beacon Press, 1946, 1974, 1992 editions, 52-3.

<sup>36</sup> Carbonell Fernández, Rubén, "La Compra-Venta de esclavos en San Juan, 1817-1873". Tesis M.A. Universidad de Puerto Rico, Río Piedras, Puerto Rico, 1976. Szászdi, Adam, "Apuntes sobre la esclavitud en San Juan de Puerto Rico, 1800-1811". *Anuario de Estudios Americanos*, Sevilla, vol. XXIII: 45, 1966. Scarano, Francisco, *Puerto Rico, Cinco Siglos de Historia*. San Juan: McGraw Hill, 1993. Coll y Toste, op. cit., Vol. I, 297-304.

<sup>37</sup> Pérez-Vega, Ivette, "Las grandes introducciones y ventas de esclavos en Ponce, 1816-30", Ricardo Alegría, ed., *Primer Congreso Internacional de Historia Económica y Social de la Cuenca del Caribe, 1763-1898*. San Juan: Instituto de Cultura Puertorriqueña, 1992.

the island. Slaves, from the Caribbean islands, Guadeloupe, Martinique, Trinidad, Curaçao and St. Thomas, were preferred because they had been “seasoned” in the islands and accustomed to the conditions of life and labor. Dependence on black labor drew Puerto Rico into the overseas slave trade, since direct participation in the slave traffic would increase the slave market and speed colonial development. The slave traffic became of prime importance of Puerto Rico’s commercial prosperity. Although slavery promoted economic progress, it also produced a society with injustice and inhumanity. Blacks did not have enough rights against the power of their owners. Negroes in every colony descended into the chattel status peculiar to North American slavery.<sup>38</sup>

The Danes were the first to abolish slave trade in 1792, effective 1802, but St. Thomas, a Danish colony free port during the 19th Century, continued with the trade. “This port is the very centre of the slave trade”, as Colonel George Flinter, an Irish officer who served in the Spanish army, asserted in 1830.<sup>39</sup> Dutch slave trade ended in 1814, but the Dutch boats from Curaçao continued bringing slaves to Puerto Rico, according to Flinter.<sup>40</sup> Guadeloupe was the most dynamic of the French islands; its slavery rose to 100,000 in 1830. The two French islands Guadeloupe and Martinique had, in the 1830s, 180,000 slaves,<sup>41</sup> many of which were sold in Puerto Rico before abolition in 1832. The slave trade in America became illegal in 1830, yet, it subsisted. Slavery in the English colonies such as Trinidad lasted until 1834, and up to 1848 in the French colonies and to the year 1863 in the Dutch islands; and in North America in 1865. When these places were eliminated as slave importers, Puerto Rico, Cuba, and Brazil received more slaves than ever;<sup>42</sup> they were the last colonies in America to free slaves: 1873, 1886,

<sup>38</sup> Pérez Vega, “Las oleadas de inmigración”, op. cit., Cap. II

<sup>39</sup> Flinter, George, *An Account of the Present State of the Island of Puerto Rico*. London: Longman, Rees, Orme, Brown, Green, and Longman, 1834, 119.

<sup>40</sup> Flinter, ibid, 120.

<sup>41</sup> Debien, Gabriel, *Les esclaves aux Antilles Francaises. Basse-Terre et Fort de France: Societé d’Histoire de la Gualaloupe, d’ Societé Histoire de Martinique*, 1974, 130.

<sup>42</sup> Scarano, Fracisco, *The Plantation Economy of Ponce (1800-1850)*. Madison: Wisconsin University Press, 1984; Moreno Fraginalls, Manuel, *El ingenio*, 3 tomos. La Habana: Editorial de Ciencias Sociales, 1978; Knight, Franklin, *Slave Society in Cuba During the 19<sup>th</sup> Century*. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1970; Bergard, Laird W., Iglesias García, and Barcia, *The Cuban Slave Market, 1790-1880*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995; Russell-Wood, A.J.R. (Anthony John R.), *The Black Man in Slavery and Freedom in Colonial Brazil*. London: Macmillan Press, 1982, 117;

1889 respectively. In Puerto Rico the slave trade from Africa was supposed to end in 1840, but it continued. It was because the acceptance of the Spanish Crown that slavery existed in the colonies. Likewise, Spain and Portugal (1808-50) refused to conform to the demands of the English on abolition of slavery, and slavery was intensified. In the business of slavery there were merchants, traders, factors, commercial agents, and even ships' captains who engaged in trading on their own account during voyages to the Caribbean Islands or to Africa. Usually in Puerto Rico the sales of the slaves that were on credit were notarized (notarial protocols) and the majority of the "cash ones" were not. It was not required by law to notarize a transaction. The arrival of a ship was not always recorded by the authorities in the official government shipment records or *Informes de entrada y salida de barcos*. The report did not always state the number of slaves they brought to the island. Therefore, we will never know for certain how many slaves or children arrived, or how many were sold, or how many ships came.

The people who most profited in Puerto Rico by the concessions, *Cédula de Gracias*, granted by the government to the immigrants were the wealthy European foreigners and well-to-do citizens of Venezuela.<sup>43</sup> Most of them were planters and slave traders, who came with cash money, their families, servants and slaves. Fundamentally important were their knowledge and experience of sugar production and slave trade, and the capital they brought, which enabled them to buy anything wanted. Neither creoles nor the peninsulares participated in the slave trade as did the foreigners and the people from Venezuela. They lacked the money that the trade demanded and the connections with the international market. The slave trade in the area of the municipality of Ponce, on the southern coast of the island, for the most part, was controlled by outsiders. Ponce changed drastically with the slave and sugar boom. By 1830 it was the second most developed city after the capital of San Juan and the first economic center on the island; its population in 15 years had increased considerably (10,000 - 16,000). Ponce had the advantage that it was easier to travel from St. Thomas to Ponce, than to San Juan. St. Thomas was at the time the most important financial point and slave trading post in the Caribbean, where the most prominent commercial

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Schwarz, Stuart B., *Sugar Plantations in the Formation of Brazilian Society*. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1985.

<sup>43</sup> Pérez-Vega, Ivette, "El efecto económico, social y político de la inmigración de Venezuela en el sur de Puerto Rico, 1810-1830". *Revista de Indias*, Sevilla, núm. 181, sept.-dic. 1987.

houses of Europe had branches.<sup>44</sup> “Besides being the center of the trade, here nearly all of the slave-trading ships and vessels at the present day resort, not to dispose of their slaves, but to fit out for the coast of Africa. On their return, their cargoes are distributed among all the islands in the West Indies, but the greatest number are sold in Porto Rico and Cuba”.<sup>45</sup> “St. Thomas is the center of smuggling to Puerto Rico, computed at one half of the amount of what is legally imported”, affirmed George Flinter.<sup>46</sup> In addition, St. Thomas became the spring board for people coming from Europe or from any point in America who were seeking fortunes and stability. Many of these mercantile houses in this island established their representatives or mediators in Puerto Rico or associated with people or merchants already established, to facilitate access to commerce, slave trading and sugar production. The slave traffic was considered an honorable enterprise as farming, manufacturing, or ordinary commerce, and all the traders enjoyed impeccable social standing. High public offices in Puerto Rico were held by slave traders, like Arthur Rogers and Thomas Davidson who became consuls of North America, and Robert Proust consul of France. The firm Charles T. (Theodore) Obermann from Hamburg (Germany) in St. Thomas was involved commercially with H. C. Merck in Hamburg, and his cousin Fernando Obermann was established in Ponce as his mediator. The latter became an hacendado, a merchant and slave trader, consequently, an opulent and powerful person in the city. His associate Guillermo Oppenheimer, also from Hamburg, had been a partner of Moller & Oppenheimer of New York; J. Souffont, son of the French slave trader J. M. Souffront of St. Thomas, associated with the German Guillermo Voigt. Gaspar Duprel was a pharmacist from Luxemburg, associated in Ponce with J. B. Saubot, a slave trader from Martinique. The firm Anduze & Gil of St. Thomas was a partner of the Vargas Brothers (emigrants from Venezuela) in Ponce; the former supplied all the money and slaves in exchange for sugar. The North American Thomas Davidson was a mediator of Hammond & Newmann, and of the merchant Peter Levering, all established in Baltimore, related to the firm Matthews & Levering of New York. Arthur Rogers from Rhode Island was the agent of his uncle, William Furnis & Co. in St. Thomas. All these foreigners living in

<sup>44</sup> Sonneson, Birgit, “Puerto Rico’s Commerce, 1835-1865: From Regional to World Wide Market Relations”. Doctoral Thesis, New York, New York University, 1985.

<sup>45</sup> Coggeshall, op. cit., 525-526.

<sup>46</sup> Flinter, op. cit., 119.

Ponce were very well connected in the export of sugar and import of slaves with the North American, Caribbean, European, and African markets.<sup>47</sup>

The large extension of lands in Ponce turned to be mainly owned by the outsiders, who became very wealthy; many became important slave traders: North Americans, Germans, French, Corsicans, a few peninsulares, and Creoles. The Creole clergyman Presbítero José Gutiérrez del Arroyo, wealthiest planter in Ponce and probably the wealthiest in the island, owned Hacienda Quemado. He was in the Capital as Deán (second position in the Catholic Episcopate). Although he was never identified as a slave trader, he had 110 slaves at his estate and 15 at his home in San Juan, including children.<sup>48</sup>

From 1816 to 1820 there were no legal slave imports in Ponce because of the rumors that the trade was going to end that year (1816). The English-Spanish Treaty of 1817 prohibited the slave trade in Spanish territories, but the local government did not pay any attention to the treaty, and the trade continued. Thus in 1820 the slave imports increased, particularly of bozales, and also, their price. Bozales were the negroes from Africa, of different tribes, who established from Senegal and Gambia to Nigeria.

Finally, when absolutism was re-established in Puerto Rico (1823-1833) the authoritarian regime was back again with the renowned governor Captain Miguel De La Torre. Paradoxically, his regime was based on a very loose social policy which has been described in our history as the governorship (1824-1837) of the “three Bs (botella -bottle, baile -dance, baraja - playing card). His view was that: “people who are happy don’t think, and won’t conspire”. He wanted to continue the development of the island at any cost, and established a new policy which restored and boosted the legal import of bozales, not from Africa but from the foreign neighboring islands. In total, there was an entrance of 1,079 slaves in Ponce, in 1824. How many children arrived? It wasn’t specified in the studied documentation, but not less than 10%, as stated by Curtin and H. Klein. Although I believe many were entered in the area, since the Reglamento sobre Esclavos de 1826 (Slaves’ Code) was not yet applicable in the Island, making the trade and the treatment of slaves very flexible with practically no restrictions.

<sup>47</sup> Pérez-Vega, op. cit., “Las oleadas de inmigración”.

<sup>48</sup> Pérez-Vega, Ivette, *El cielo y la tierra en sus manos: Los grandes propietarios de Ponce, 1816-1830*. Río Piedras, Editorial Huracán, 1985.



## CHILD SLAVES

The slave trade also manifested itself a very low incidence of children in America during the 19<sup>th</sup> Century, no more than 10 % of all transported from Africa, except in Cuba (in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> Century), that was 20%.<sup>49</sup> Since women and children were highly appraised in African societies, it was the main reason why there were not many on the coast for sale. The fact that few children were carried to America was of fundamental importance in the history of population growth. There is no doubt that the majority of women and children of those enslaved were kept in Africa (women for reproduction), and men were sold. The predominance of men in the Atlantic trade clearly resulted from an African preference for keeping women and children in the country.<sup>50</sup> Nevertheless, 56% of slaves in 19<sup>th</sup> Century America were under the age of 21.

Raids in Africa by farmers were common during the 19<sup>th</sup> Century on groups, capturing women and children for enslavement, as objects of sale or trading, and in exchange for animals. The practice of taking infants and children as prisoners of war who could be sold or exchanged was not considered slavery by African societies. Moreover, it made these societies tempted to enter into child slave trading with Europeans, to be sent to America. They preferred children than adults because they were easier to capture and move, more easily controlled, and could be kept indefinitely. Also, the recruiters would capture children nearly grown and strong enough to be useful on their farms. When children were caught as prisoners of war in the attacks of African groups, frequently they would be traded in exchange for cattle, or sheep.<sup>51</sup> A child could be exchanged for six oxen. Many orphans were placed in apprenticeship or household slavery, up to the age of 25. Children as indentured servants expanded in South Africa as part of the household economy and for export, since they could be

<sup>49</sup> Klein, op. cit., *African Slavery*, 148; Klein, op. cit. *Middle Passage*; Curtin, op. cit., *The Atlantic Slave*.

<sup>50</sup> Curtin, *ibid.*; Klein, *ibid.*, *Middle Passage*.

<sup>51</sup> Inikori, Joseph E. and Engerman, Stanley, ed., *The Atlantic Slave Trade: Effects and Economics, Societies and Peoples in Africa, the Americas, and Europe*. Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1992; Curtin, Philip, *African History, From Earliest Times to Independence*. London and New York: Longman, 1990.

legally traded.<sup>52</sup> Consequently, open trading of African children became a common practice. These skilled domestic slaves were in great demand in the market and were expensive. Thus the African trade developed a thriving export sector on children, and not only on ivory from elephant tusks. Children were referred to as "black ivory", an export item, like white ivory, obtained from elephant hunting.<sup>53</sup> They became very highly priced as young as above 3 years. The ones above 3 years were for the most part easily controlled, cared for, and trainable.

"Children were caught like wild game [in Africa] by unscrupulous recruiters and brought together from the different ports, tied together and being driven by the recruiters to the ports, where they would be distributed like things without life... They became the children of devilish circumstances.... They were utter savages, joyless, soulless animals hoping for nothing, but fearing much, for they were surely oppressed by their masters".<sup>54</sup> Indeed, they were vulnerable to sexual abuse by their masters, being raped or being pressured to sexual relationships.

Needy African families, mostly the fathers, desiring to punish their children and also, the concubines, gave them to back-lenders, who would have them as slaves.<sup>55</sup> During the period between abolition of the slave trade and emancipation (1808-1834) in South Africa, thousand of slaves were sold. A high number of them, between 1816 and 1834, were children being disposed with the mothers.<sup>56</sup> In the 19<sup>th</sup> Century – 1811 to 1870 – 2.4 million slaves were brought to America, the vast majority going to Brazil and the Spanish Caribbean, especially Cuba. Many were prisoners of war. Most of the slaves who left Africa in this century arrived in Brazil (over 1.2 million); the majority of these came from southern Africa, and almost all them kidnapped, over 60 %. The rest were

<sup>52</sup> Bank, Andrew, *The Decline of Urban Slavery at the Cape, 1806 to 1843*. Cape Town: University of Cape Town Printing Office, 1991; Bank, Andrew, *Slavery in Cape Town, 1806 to 1834*. Cape Town: University of Cape Town Printing Office, 1991, 81; Eldredge, Elizabeth A., and Morton, Fred, *Slavery in South Africa: Captive Labor in the Dutch Frontier*. Boulder and Oxford: Westview Press and Pietermaritzburg: University of Natal Press, 1994, 94.

<sup>53</sup> Alpers, Edward A., *Ivory and Slaves: Changing Patterns of International Trade in East Central Africa to the Later Nineteenth Century*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1975, 74.

<sup>54</sup> Walker, Charles, "Charles Walker's Letters From Puerto Rico, 1835-1837." Annotated and with an introduction by Kenneth Scott. *Caribbean Studies Vol. 5, No. 1* April 1965: 37-50.

<sup>55</sup> Conrad, Robert Edgar, *Children of God's Fire: A Document History of Black Slavery in Brazil*. New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1983, 31.

<sup>56</sup> Patterson, Orlando, *Slavery and Social Death, A Comparative Study*. Cambridge and London: Harvard University Press, 1982, 148-171.

prisoners<sup>57</sup>, since there was a shortage of slaves in Africa between 1807 and 1828. One to two percent of all Cape (South Africa) child slaves under 13 were orphans. In 1823, approximately 224 orphan slaves about 13-years of age were on sale. Whether they were sold in the oceanic or the domestic trade, they were usually disposed of alone, without their parents; the process worsened in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century despite some protective legislation. "All slaves [as in Puerto Rico], undoubtedly, bore the brunt of the slave market through the orphaning of children". "The slave was a perpetual child always dependant on that owner or master", the slave owners had succeeded in making these reforms [slave protective legislation] ineffective", as expressed by the renown historian Robert Shell;<sup>58</sup> as well as in the Caribbean colonies. "It was in 1838, when apprenticeship ended, that slaves were supposed to have acquired free status; and then started the partial compensation to slave owners.<sup>59</sup> However, the event did not mean the end of slavery: illegal slave trade continued. Still in 1880, the business with children was going on in South Africa.

When there was a shortage of slaves in Africa the slave traders would buy everybody including women with infants, pregnant women, even the lame, the blind, the deaf. The sex or age or status did not matter, as long as the person could be sold. For example, a boy of 12 and his family in Africa were seized (1830) by a man to whom their uncle was in debt and the uncle had died. They were sold by this man on the coast of Africa, to be taken as slaves to America.<sup>60</sup> When a child was captured as a slave, he was attached to an iron chain that bound him to other slaves. The piece of chain was attached to the right hand or to his neck or both. When the child was first traded, he would have to bear the brand mark of the backtender or trader who enslaved him, so he could be recognized, in case he ran away. Child captives were particularly suited for being detached from their parent African societies and educated in a paternalistic Spanish environment. They became useful and expensive merchandise provided mainly by the local traders that was virtually unavailable in Puerto Rico.

<sup>57</sup> Patterson, *ibid.*, 119-120.

<sup>58</sup> Shell, Robert C. -H., *Children of Bondage, A Social History of the Slave Society at the Cape of Good Hope*. Hanover and London: Wesleyan University Press, University Press of New England, 1994, 129, 222-4

<sup>59</sup> Thompson, Leonard, *A History of South Africa*. London and New York: Longman, 1978, 275.

<sup>60</sup> Conrad, *op. cit.*, 31, 37.

Filthy dungeons, cold and dark, or barracones (barracks), “hot as hell”, in the African coast and everywhere in the world, were utilized as prisons near the sea, where thousands of slaves were assembled and detained for any length of time, waiting for the unknown. Slaves never knew they were going to be sent away, until they were placed on board the ship,<sup>61</sup> thus to be taken to an unknown destiny or journey without return. While kept in dungeons or barracones, they would do all their personal necessities in this place: excrete and urinate, eat, sleep on bare floors; never to bathe or to change clothes. A place of confinement and foul air, it was fetid from the inevitable crowd of persons and multiple other causes. A place of dirt, its detestable odor was intolerable for a human being, where the excrement would pile up forever, never to be removed. Being there seemed to be eternal, waiting for nothing; facing the reality of their uncertain future.

## THE TRIP TO THE UNKNOWN

In the 19<sup>th</sup> Century, traders transferred slaves from Africa to the New World in ocean steamers. After a child was brought as a cargo to America, he would remain most of the time naked on deck on board the ship, since usually the clothes of all the slaves were stripped off. Small children were never restrained in the interior of the ship. Sometimes the younger ones became so afraid in the ship that they would jump overboard, because of the “fear they were being fattened to be eaten or because of the uncertainty of what would happen to them, since they did not know for what purpose they were taken”. All of the children and women presented a spectacle of misery and hunger in the ship. There were mothers with infants who were vainly trying to suck milk. Children of 5 or 6 would faint from hunger. Others of every intermediate age would steal anything of food and water to satisfy their needs. “Young girls were so frightened that they would stay still, as if waiting for the worse to happen”.<sup>62</sup> Although children suffered no higher mortality rates in crossing than any other group of slaves, their lower sale prices with their costs of transportation equal to adults, discouraged slave captains from purchasing them<sup>63</sup>.

<sup>61</sup> Conrad, *ibid.*, 28.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*, 38-9.

<sup>63</sup> Klein, *op. cit.*, Middle Passage.

When the slaves reached a Spanish colony (port), they were immediately branded on their right breast with the coat of arms of the Crown, made of a hot silver instrument carimbo. Then another brand mark was placed on the left breast or on the arm of the slave with the name of the private master under whose name he was transported to America.<sup>64</sup> This was executed in the act of paying the king's duties. In 1830, the traders were supposed to be paying a tax duty of 25 pesos per slave. Sales were also arranged by retail merchants who acted as slave agents as an adjunct to their regular business, as in stores, and warehouses. Slaves bought in other Caribbean colonies had to be paid in cash. Despite the hundred of slaves brought into Puerto Rico illegally, very few traders were caught for smuggling during the 19<sup>th</sup> Century. So far was the chance of being caught that traders could carry on their operations with complete disregard for the import regulations.

The owner's right to sell his slaves was unquestioned. The most common reasons for selling a slave were to make a profit, lack of money, the need to raise cash, or the need to liquidate a estate including the slaves, to satisfy claims or creditors. The slaves were also sold in the plantations or haciendas instead as in the port by traders and planters together, especially when sellers were also planters. Then, the slaves were divided into lots by the shareholders, and were "offered for sale like any other animal". They were sold naked (children and adults of both sexes), so the buyer would see the quality of the merchandise in which he was interested. Some slaves were sold for personal reasons; others were presented by owners with appealing descriptions as: healthy, strong, active, hearty, even if they were concealing defects. The traders had physical and behavior attractive descriptions on slaves: "inoffensive, docile, beautiful, strong, delicate".<sup>65</sup> The regular auctions of slaves at the ports of the island were held almost every week. The big event was advertised throughout the town by an announcer giving notice of the arrival of slaves. At the auction, the potential buyers assembled to bid for them. The bidders checked all the slaves like livestock, inspecting their bodies, their teeth, or signs of infirmity or age or physical defects. Sales were not only psychologically threatening to children; they were also an economic and physical reality

<sup>64</sup> Díaz Soler, op. cit. 21-22.

<sup>65</sup> Turnbull, David, *Travels in the West. Cuba, with Notes of Porto Rico and the Slave Trade*. London: Longman, Imp. E. & Spottiswoode, 1840.

that symbolized their status as property. It was a visible, well-attended and humiliating spectacle. A notable number of the population from the city and its vicinity would be there. The auction united the power of the trader and buyer with the fear and powerlessness of the child slave.

Some sellers preferred the public auction, since it was a faster alternative, and the transactions were in cash, but with the possibility that the slave might be sold for less value. Buyers could protect themselves by reserving the right to cancel the sale if the slave did not measure the sellers' offering. If a business required specialized slave workers, experienced slaves were included in the sale. A conditional sale also protected the buyer against loss if, during the trial period, the slave became ill, died or ran away. His only liability was for loss attributable to his own negligence. But if the sale was final, as it an auction, the buyer had no recourse against the seller. In cases of fraud, where seemingly healthy slaves turned out to be cripples or epileptics or have developed some fatal disease soon after the sale, buyers sometimes recovered damages,<sup>66</sup> or returned the slave to the seller. Fraudulent sales remained a matter for private litigation in the civil courts.

The newspapers in America, as *La Gaceta* (Puerto Rico), played an important role in advertising sales and hiring of slaves. Advertisements usually informed prospective buyers' descriptions of the slave, age, sex, capacities, price, and the barter of slaves for goods and cash arrangement. They could be sold to several buyers, but this was not the usual practice. The high volume of advertisements demonstrates that the ethical right of an owner to dispose of his slaves for any reason was always recognized. Generally, the slaves most in demand were children of fourteen to seventeen years old and young ones up to twenty, since they were active and likelier to learn new tasks and skills. Prospective buyers wanted slaves in good health conditions and particularly with immunity to the dreadful disease of smallpox even though they had to pay a higher price. So much emphasis on youth and good health undercut the market for older blacks. Slaves older than forty were rarely sold and, women with a record of fecundity or pregnancy. That a slave birth technically increased the owner's capital did not offset the personal inconvenience of sharing living space with unwanted children. Sometimes

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<sup>66</sup> McManus, op. cit.

such children were advertised “to be given away” by owners who found them a costly nuisance. An owner was too eager to get rid of a child slave when he advertised in a journal or newspaper the offering to pay anyone who could take the child away.<sup>67</sup> Sterility was highly prized that women could be sold well beyond their regular price.

After the sale, when the child slave arrived usually naked, at his new house, he stumbled on his shocking reality: a different family or master, a different language, religion or culture. The child was “forced to reject his own beliefs and gods and worship those of his master”.<sup>68</sup> The family, domestic culture, paternalism, religion of the master and symbols of power of the plantation served as effective tools in imposing obedience and control over the child. The haciendas “came to symbolize their respective slave society”.<sup>69</sup> The religious and educational goal for many slave mothers was to have their children recite the bible by the time they were grown-ups. Soon this indoctrination transformed the child into a docile person prepared for his first duty, as a domestic servant: taking care of the white children of the big house. It is pathetic to realize that, child slaves as domestic servants, “were not [only], instruments of making things or of production, but of living, which constantly consumed their services”, as stated by the Jewish political philosopher Hannah Arendt.<sup>70</sup> Not only [consumed] their services but their lives. The isolation of the plantation in the rural context helped his transformation. Besides, the big house was a form of social control and acculturation.<sup>71</sup> As Shells declares: “The chains for domestic slavery at the hacienda were principally psychological. Slaves were incorporated into a carefully organized domestic hegemony in which they were treated as permanent children”.<sup>72</sup> The direct control of the house over the child gave him opportunity to detach himself from the dominant African class

<sup>67</sup> McManus, *ibid.*, 38.

<sup>68</sup> Patterson, *op. cit.*, *Slavery and Social Death*, 152; Patterson, *op. cit.*, *Slavery and Sexuality*; McManus, *op. cit.*; Baralt, Guillermo A., *Esclavos Rebeldes*. Río Piedras: Ediciones Huracán, 1982; Gutman, Herbert and Sutch, Richard, “The Slave Family” in Paul A. David, et al., eds, *Reckoning with Slavery: A Critical Study in the Quantitative History of American Slavery*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1976.

<sup>69</sup> Shell, *op. cit.*

<sup>70</sup> Arendt, Hannah, *The Human Condition*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998, 122.

<sup>71</sup> Freyre, Gilberto, *Casa Grande and Senzala: A Study in the Development of Brazilian Civilization*. New York: Random House, 1985; or, *Casa Grande y Senzala: Formación de la familia brasileña bajo el régimen de la economía patriarcal*. Caracas: Biblioteca Ayacucho, 1977; Patterson, *op. cit.*, *Slavery and Social Death*; Smith, David Blake, *Inside the Great House*. Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1986.

<sup>72</sup> Shell, *op. cit.*, 251.

culture and ideology.<sup>73</sup> The plantation was designed to keep the slaves, including children, from outside contact, the only entrance and exit being through the master's house. As described by an English visitor to the great Hacienda Vayas in Ponce in 1830: "It [the entrance of the planter's house] is one hundred feet in front, with porticos or galleries on both sides... Adjoining both ends of the house are the negro' houses, and also at right angles, are rows of negro houses of brick, his mills, sugar house and distillery, with the hospital in front. The buildings form a square, and from the [second floor] piazza of the plantation house, you see what is going on below. The entrance when closed, keep the negroes at home".<sup>74</sup> Slaves were in an area as if were under siege.

The domestic child slaves lived in a special relationship with centers of authority that brought greater paternalism and claustrophobia than owner field relations.<sup>75</sup> The slave family, ordinarily composed of only the mother and the child/children, probably was more a mode of social control for their child/children slaves than for the imported ones because of the family ties. The family served as a major deterrent to running away. Also, the family life, and even the slave family, provided an intimate and a particular autonomous world, which gave shelter from the brutality of bondage. Except for their biological contribution, the men played almost no role in the raising of children slaves. It was the mother who was the symbol of authority and protection for the child<sup>76</sup>. Most imported children were placed in slave family units, either in the barracones (negroes' houses) or in the big house (planter's house). Imported children were like orphans yearning for a family. Their desire to cling on to established bonds of intimacy made them to remain, without disrupting the slaves or their master's family life. The plantation, their own circumstances, the other slaves, the big house, their master, were their reminder of physical, powerful symbols of the children's inferiority, which, paradoxically, all gave them security. It was a contradiction: brutality and kindness, all of which the plantation represented in their most intimate feelings, most likely, without being able to understand it.<sup>77</sup> An absolute control of masters over children heightened

<sup>73</sup> Genovese, Eugene D., Roll, Jordan, Roll: The World the Slaveholders Made. New York: Pantheon Books, 1974.

<sup>74</sup> Walker, op. cit., 43.

<sup>75</sup> Genovese, op. cit., 325-63.

<sup>76</sup> McManus, op. cit., 98.

<sup>77</sup> Patterson, op. cit., Slavery and Social Death, 163.



the intensity of interaction, which often developed into struggle or attempts by the child to resist coercive and consensual mechanisms of control in an unbalanced relationship in the master's favor. The child was afraid of expressing any negative remark to his master. Usually the children were controlled by physical and psychological violence. Certainly, a lot of exploitation and abuse was going on in the big house, about which probably nobody would talk: rape, homosexuality, and bestiality on children. They were utilized by their masters as instruments of luxury and vanity; as objects of their pleasure were preferred because they were easy to manipulate and control by fear.<sup>78</sup> The owners were "allowed to be pampered by children, who provided them with the fancies that made them feel satisfied".<sup>79</sup> If on the contrary, the child slave did anything the master did not like, he would be severely punished or sold. The following account from 1830 presents this situation by a visitor to one of the haciendas in Puerto Rico: [This] "may serve to illustrate the natural love of finery in the female sex". "A small cargo of African slaves was imported into this island. Mrs. Kelly [who seems to be North American or British and who most probably was the wife of the ship owner Captain Kelly] went to a depot where they were kept and purchased a female slave of about 12 years of age [Imagine a 12 years old girl kept in a slave depot!]. She was a slender, delicate little girl of good features, and although she spoke not a word of English, was quick to understand, and apt to learn. She was very thin, quite naked except for an apron, which she wore about her loins. Her mistress had her thoroughly scrubbed and washed with soap suds, and then dressed her in fine, gay-colored clothing. She had a red handkerchief gracefully tied round her head and put rings in her ears and bracelets on her arms. Mrs. Kelly taught her to sew, and [the girl] wait upon her as a personal servant.... Everything went well, until the little girl in some way offended her mistress, when in lieu of whipping, Mrs. Kelly took off all her finery, and put on the original apron that she was wearing when purchased; she [Mrs. Kelly] then pointed at her apron and her fine clothing, accused her of the basest ingratitude, and threatened to sell her if she should ever again be guilty of the smallest offense..."<sup>80</sup> This situation shows the way children were manipulated by their owners to do whatever they

<sup>78</sup> Patterson, op. cit., *Slavery and Sexuality*, 101.

<sup>79</sup> Díaz Soler, op. cit., 149; Coggeshall, op. cit., 525-6.

<sup>80</sup> Coggeshall, *ibid.*, 525.

wanted from them, including sexual matters as favors, abuse, sexual relations, homosexuality and bestiality.<sup>81</sup>

This situation of abuse, humiliation, and sexual relations with children is clearly exposed in the narrative *Color Purple* by Alice Walker, based on child slaves in the United States. Walker says: "Silence is in the [slaves] girls' games and in their lives." The girl slave in the narrative is fourteen, and her stepfather had impregnated her for the second time. Afterwards, both children were taken from her. By then, she had also lost her parents and her sister, and she was given to this black man for the price of a cow; for all intents and purposes she had lost her life. Because she had been systematically stripped of her identity, she could not even sing her grief she could not express herself to the world. This girl's problem revolved around what is called "the muteness of slavery",<sup>82</sup> or their silence.

When child slaves were not properly nourished and clothed, commonly, petty theft was carried on by them. Stealing beyond the master's eye and being caught brought the possibility being harshly whipped, and locked-up for a long period of time in a dark room without food or water. For example, Juan Manzano a Creole Cuban mulatto of 12 was locked for 24 hours in a coal cellar on his master plantation. As he stated in his account: "What I experienced in that cell, suffering from hunger and thirst and tormented by fear... a place apart from the house, next to a stinking and steaming garbage dump, a damp place with rats that walked over me... Always thin, weak and exhausted, always starving... eating all I found, for which reason I was seen as the greediest... My faults: not listening the first time and forgetting a word or the message when sent on an errand... always afraid of being sold... I had a distressing life. I started to tremble when called... When I was a kid, I was well treated, but now, since my mistress has died and I was given to another family [probably sold], I am very badly treated..."<sup>83</sup> The masters controlled the children by exercising physical violence, which tended to counteract its purpose, sometimes inciting more acts of resistance.<sup>84</sup> Even though all 19<sup>th</sup> Century slave children may not have been whipped, separated from their

<sup>81</sup> Patterson, op. cit., *Slavery and Sexuality*, 103.

<sup>82</sup> Walker, Alice, *The Color Purple*. New York: Longman, 1982.

<sup>83</sup> Manzano, Juan Francisco, *Autobiografía de un esclavo*. Madrid: Ediciones Guadarrama, 1975. Translation.

<sup>84</sup> Baralt, op. cit., 41.

families or abused, most probably they were all affected and threatened by it.<sup>85</sup> As the writer Toni Morrison says, “Children were whipped like adults, and adults were whipped like children”.<sup>86</sup> Desertion by children as a form of resistance represented a rejection of their condition, of the institution of slavery, repudiating the regime. Generally, they would escape to the countryside. Few would go to the city, where they could be recognized by the authorities. Mostly they were the newcomers and uncultured ones. Also, there was a temptation for the older ones to exchange life in bondage for a life at sea, idealizing they would go back to their place of origin.

Very young the child slaves developed a culture of recreation and relaxation like their peers in Puerto Rico: drinking, gambling, card playing, cock fighting, music-making and dancing on week-ends outside the big house and the places of work. Singing their songs was their way of expression of their subjugation, pain and grief. Rum produced at the plantation by slaves was probably more available than water, so it was rather easy to obtain it, even for youngsters. As viewed by Shell in the Cape area (South Africa), similar in Puerto Rico: “The highly unbalanced slave population exhibited all the behavior sociologically associated with abnormally high sex ratios: violence, homosexual activity, drinking, and gambling”.<sup>87</sup>

The widespread and largely urban-centered practices of living tended to undercut the domination and immediate social contact between child and owner. The power relations were weaker and the control in the city was more fragile. It was harder to maintain control over children in the city. The occupational mobility the children had from 10 to 14 years old in the port city and contact with local people and outsiders of different sexes, ages and social class made the power relations weaker. Slave control was more difficult in town, for it was there that slaves would get together under the pretense of serving their masters; and the daily contacts with every level of society made the slaves more conscious about white superiority. Moreover, city life encouraged aggressiveness among blacks that was inconsistent with their legal status.<sup>88</sup> Undoubtedly, slave controls severely restricted the movement of the negroes. Any slave found wandering about without a pass was to be arrested as a runaway, and the cost of

<sup>85</sup> King, op. cit., 57.

<sup>86</sup> Morrison, Toni, *Beloved*. New York: Plume, 1998, 33.

<sup>87</sup> Shell, op. cit., 405.

<sup>88</sup> McManus, op. cit., 77.

his detention was to be paid by his owner. Curfew violators were to be punished by flogging. The law made slaveholders legally accountable for their slaves. Stealing was the most common slave violation of the law and the one most frequently directed against the owners. The usual punishment for theft was flogging, from twenty to twenty-five lashes for the offense.

It caught my attention that the slave warehouse of the foreign slave trader Francisco María Tristany located in the port area of Ponce was robbed in 1825. A boy slave Manuel, of unknown master, was accused of robbery, but it was not revealed what he stole. Probably, Manuel was a runaway like many others who had left his master, and was roaming around looking for child slaves to free them. Because of the incident, two male slaves were jailed, but the boy was not because he was a minor<sup>89</sup>. By law, the owner was responsible for the offence of a minor slave, in this case the robbery. Finally, I do not know what happened to the boy. Certainly I can speculate that, according to the custom in slave penalties or punishments, he must had been strongly physically punished by his master, whipped with a foete, and would probably be placed in isolation in the dark for a long time or sold.

## CHILD SLAVES TRADE IN PONCE

Before the 19<sup>th</sup> Century, in 1765, there were 1,598 child slaves in Puerto Rico up to 10 years old. Very early in the century the children acquired high prices. In the official government shipment record or Informe de entrada y salida de barcos de Ponce (1816-1818) there was not an account of slaves; it was only stated “shipment of slaves”.<sup>90</sup> At the beginning, the principal shipper was a peninsular Captain Miguel Martínez, owner of the sloop Carmen. In 1818 Armando Sebastián Bailleache (Spanish), the merchant who was dealing with the slave trade in town, received an “unspecified number” of slaves supplied by the French Captain Suplis Lamutt in the boat Estrella. A year later in May 1819, he received 125 negrillos (child slaves) from 11 to 15 years old, brought from Guadaloupe by Captain Kelly. Bailleache sold them at 200 pesos each, which I consider a high price for this time in Puerto Rico.<sup>91</sup> In December Bailleache received 25

<sup>89</sup> PNP, 130-4, 1825.

<sup>90</sup> Entrada y salida de barcos, Ponce, 1815-1830.

<sup>91</sup> PNP, 94v-100, 1824.

additional negrillos from a Danish boat, and in March of 1821 received another 25 bozales of different ages and sexes in a French sloop. Why, so early in the century, were people buying child slaves, and such expensive ones? It seems that the majority were males. Given the availability of male adult slaves, I wonder why there were so many children in the market so soon after the slave trade had shifted to Puerto Rico. At the time, before 1820, traders were asking about 300 pesos for 17 to 25-years old "good" slaves, so, why buy expensive children? Commonly, a few years before, children were being sold for 100 to 125 pesos. In 1816 an 8-years old boy was sold at 150, one of 12 at 225 pesos, and other of 15 at 250 pesos.<sup>92</sup>

Children at the early age of four or five were expected to work in the house up to the rest of their childhood. The young ones were utilized mainly in domestic work: in the kitchen, washing clothes, running errands and taking care of the children of the house; the older ones in the field taking care of the animals, cleaning ditches, working with the hoe, weeding, mulching the earth already planted with cane, collecting coffee. By using a stick, they would make the oxen go faster, to turn the rollers of the sugar mill. From 6 to 12 they were called mulecos or muleques, to 18-years mulecones; older, they were considered adults.<sup>93</sup> Children who were separated from their mothers or came alone to America did not know their ages, and the owners were not interested in letting them know. If they looked older, 18-years old, they would go to work in the fields as adults, and certainly, they would have a higher price. During the sugar season both women and children would work even on Sundays. Because of the mentality of the slave owners, for their own interests they would say, "Slaves are lazy by nature, not intelligent; they have to be busy working in the field. Children have to be taught and obliged to work very early in their lives so if they are freed when adults, they do not get vicious and become beggars as they usually do".<sup>94</sup> By the Spanish law on slaves, *Reglamento sobre Esclavos*, of 1826, child slaves less than 17 had to work on chores compatible with their sex, age or strength, and girls could not be working with boys.<sup>95</sup> According to the Laws of the Indies for the American colonies, black slaves could only

<sup>92</sup> PNP, 23, 1816.

<sup>93</sup> Díaz Soler, op. cit., 21-22; *Reglamento sobre Esclavos*, op. cit. (Cap. IV, Art. 1-4), 103-11.

<sup>94</sup> Flinter, op. cit., 37.

<sup>95</sup> *Reglamento sobre Esclavos*, op. cit. (Cap. IV, Art. 1-4), 105.

work between the ages of 17 to 60.<sup>96</sup> These laws were not always complied by the owners, since generally slaves did not know the laws that governed or protected them. As Flinter commented: "Children have to be prepared for freedom if that comes into their lives". A child "needs 50 years to get civilized". "They should be bought by masters who will educate them in the Catholic religion and love for work, so they become industrious and useful in society. They have to be baptized within a year of arriving. There should be correction houses to have them locked-up when they commit offences".<sup>97</sup>

The increased number of child slaves in Puerto Rico, as the local government reported, was due primarily to the union of women and men slaves, since there was more or less the same quantity of them on the island, stated Colonel Flinter that year 1830. There were about 45,000 slaves of a population of 400,000 in that year;<sup>98</sup> there were 22,000 slaves of a population of 250,000 in 1820. Evidently, these numbers are not quite accurate, since there was a great majority of slave men on the island. In addition, abortion was frequent among the slave women, because many did not want to have the burden of a child as a slave. Also a minority of the children born of slave women lived long enough to grow into adulthood, because there was a high incidence of mortality in newborns, principally because of diseases. The hard work of pregnant women and the bad nourishment, and their rejection to have a newborn forced them to abort the infants. As a master would say: "There is no advantage in tolerating the newborns, who will be capable of similar labor only after sixteen years",<sup>99</sup> in view the fact he had their responsibility. Therefore, it was more profitable to buy adults. When they were small and the mothers would be working in the fields, one or two women slaves would take care of the negrillos in a hut prepared for that purpose; or if an infant was sick, the mother or another woman slave had to stay to take care of him. Commonly practiced, the children, like adults, would also sleep in hammocks. As the Reglamento sobre Esclavos of 1826 stated, it was the responsibility of the owners to nourish and dress the child slaves, and they could not be freed with the intention of giving up this responsibility, unless the child was taken in charge by someone who could take care of

<sup>96</sup> Dognac, op. cit., 288.

<sup>97</sup> Flinter, op. cit, 59, 68, 69.

<sup>98</sup> Ibid., 49-50, 73.

<sup>99</sup> Flinter, ibid., 37.

him/her.<sup>100</sup> From 3 to 6 years they would be dressed in a cotton dress, the same for girls and boys; from 6 to 13 they would wear pants and skirts; from 14 on they would dress as adults (shirt, pants, hat, handkerchief, and a heavy piece of cloth for protection from the weather). Slaves would dress uniformly so that they could immediately be distinguished from free people. They would eat plantains, yams and fish, except milk for newborns and infants up to one-year of age (Reglamento sobre Esclavos).

Then, in 1819, the local government started granting permissions only to the hacendados to introduce slaves. It was the authorities' method of controlling the entrance of slaves, since illicit importation had become widespread, and the Spanish coffers of the Hacienda Pública (Treasury) were not receiving royal revenues from the entrance of slaves. This was the manner by which the hacendados, who were also slave traders, supplied themselves with laborers, without paying taxes for the slaves and selling the extra ones for high profits.<sup>101</sup>

## SLAVE TRADERS OR NEGREROS

The slave trader who really started the large-scale trade in the region of Ponce was the foreigner Francisco María Tristany (Corsican) in 1819. He notarized most of the sales, because he sold mainly on credit or exchanged the slaves for other commodities, such as coffee or houses. Lack of specie encouraged bartering slaves for products and properties. His "partner" was a merchant in St. Thomas, to whom he sent coffee. The slaves were delivered primarily from Guadaloupe. Tristany soon became wealthy because at first, on his arrival, he was only committed to this trade and started early in the business. For thirteen years, 1817 to 1830, he devoted his time to the same commercial area. In 1819 the Venezuelan José Joaquín Vargas, one of the Vargas Brothers from La Guaira, asked permission to the authorities to introduce 140 slaves for his hacienda, then the Catalanian Pablo Vidal asked for 58 slaves and "others" (unspecified number) for his household. Most probably they sold all of them with big earnings.<sup>102</sup>

<sup>100</sup> Reglamento sobre Esclavos, op. cit. (Cap. VI, Art. 1-6, op. cit.), 106-7; Flinter, *ibid.*, 38.

<sup>101</sup> Pérez-Vega, Ivette, "La trata en Ponce, Siglo XIX". *Revista Horizontes*, Pontificia Universidad Católica de Ponce, Año XXXIV, núm. 67, 1990-91.

<sup>102</sup> Pérez Vega, op. cit., "Las grandes introducciones".

In accordance with customs, the selling of a household or hacienda included the slaves, because they were considered property as an integral part of it, except the personal ones (such as concubines and children) of the owner. The wealth of a person, therefore, was frequently counted in terms of the number of slaves he owned. However, when Fernando Obermann sold to Guillermo Voigt half (1/2) of his Hacienda La Constancia in Ponce in 1818 with 24 slaves, the sale included his concubine Juana (Juana María Escobales) with her inborn girl María Teresa, whom she was nurturing.<sup>103</sup> Juana, a bozal, had been Obermann's mistress for many years. His action shows that even with concubines and offsprings, masters could have little affectionate attachment when considering the sale of this valuable piece of property, as an hacienda, including the slaves. It also shows that no affection was attached to human lives, and only money value was attached to them. The total value of slaves was sometimes higher than the value of the hacienda without slaves. In 1824, María Teresa, six-years old, was freed with her mother, but obliged to stay on the hacienda until she became an adult although with all the privileges of ex-slaves.<sup>104</sup> "Freedom was never a right, only a favor to be granted".<sup>105</sup> The most restrictive way of emancipation was by this method. It meant that the child became an indentured servant for a time in the conditions the master would stipulate in practice, so the living conditions would stay the same. In whatever manner, the promise of complete freedom was preferable to permanent enslavement. This was the case where master-slave progeny received freedom because of parental status.

Low level of manumission of children has been seen as indicative of a relative low degree of their social mobility and status, but in other respects there was a high social mobility of them. Since they were sold frequently, they would change owners often. This situation would pose a threatening position for them of fear and psychological damage. By law, Reglamento sobre Esclavos de 1826, children could not be freed alone until they were 18 years old; the liberation had to be with their mother.<sup>106</sup> There was a strong association of master's relation to slave mistress women and low

<sup>103</sup> PNP, 150-3, 213, 1820.

<sup>104</sup> Pérez-Vega, Ivette, "Juana María Escobales, liberta liberada". Homines, Universidad Interamericana, núm. 1-2, 1987-88; in A. Fambres Buxeda, et al, La mujer en Puerto Rico frente a una era global. Special electronic edition and book publication. San Juan, Puerto Rico: Homines, Universidad Interamericana de Puerto Rico, 2004, pp. 34-40.

<sup>105</sup> Shell, op. cit., 406.

<sup>106</sup> Díaz Soler, op. cit., 154.



incidence of manumission of these children. Also, liberation could be pursued by the purchase of freedom, coartación, usually the mother paying the value of the child. Liberty for children was granted by owners either during their lives or upon their death. Many children in Puerto Rico were born of a female slave and her master. Generally, the children were never mentioned in any private or public document or certified as offspring of these men, nor did they have special treatment from them in the big house, and few got their freedom before the fathers died; many were sold with their mothers but more were sold alone when they were infants or later in life. Without particularizing, the children never knew who their fathers were. There was not a paternalistic behavior on the part of the owners regarding their slaves in the research, except Fernando Obermann with his freed daughter María Teresa. A slave represented an expensive thing with a monetary value that could be used for anything. There was among the owners a profound patrician attitude toward their slaves; no love was shown for them, even though, they were not mistreated or unfed. Slaves in Puerto Rico had to be care for properly because they represented the most significant investment in the hacienda and there was no life insurance for them; if he/she became unable to work, the master had to keep him/her until the slave died, and if he had to buy another one, most probable he/she would cost more. Slaveholders were burdened with capital costs in the form of interest rates on investments that were very high with maintenance and health costs of the slaves, depreciation costs, since market value declined with age, and that could not be avoided. Despite high maintenance and costs, there was no alternative to the slave system. Slaves were in fact the only workers available in sufficient numbers to labor in the sugar plantations. Negroes were bought or hired as personal property, and bills of sale were executed to do the transfer of titles. They were mortgaged and used as collaterals for the debts of their masters. As property child slaves could be taken from their mothers on writs of attachments of the civil court to seize a debtor's property and sell it for the benefit of creditors. In 19<sup>th</sup> Century Puerto Rico, "not only slaves were in bondage, but the owners as well", as in the slave society in South Africa.<sup>107</sup>

María Teresa grew-up in Obermann's house with her mother, and as her parents' testaments revealed, she was treated well, even though the girl did not show any

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<sup>107</sup> Shell, op. cit., xxv.

affection for her father, as he states in one of his wills. Besides, as an important commentary, only wealthy people would declare a testament, to have their wealth designated to their chosen ones. When the girl was six, in 1824, freed by Obermann, he decided to send her to Maine, in the eastern part of the United States, under the custody of Captain White, and to be left in charge of Madame María Morell Dow, of unknown origin. Why Maine? Because there were many freed slaves, but there existed evident discrimination in all the New England states. Most probably, the girl would receive there an education that must have been on manners, reading and writing, and English. It is the only case in the research, the only freed child who was sent to the U.S. to be educated. Slavery still existed in the U.S., but the slave trade with Africa in this area had been abolished in 1807. In Puerto Rico there was no place that she would be able to receive an education, except at home with a private teacher. Also, because of the discrimination that existed even against a freed slave, she would have been considered a slave. Since the freed mother was a mulata (mulatta) and the father was white, most probably the girl looked white, and that was the reason for Obermann to send her away, that because of her physical appearance in the northeast region of the United States she could be considered white. After four years in Maine with Madame Morell, Obermann brought her back because he was not satisfied with the education she was receiving; I suspect that the girl was not treated as free. We have to consider the fact that in 1830 schools accepting black children as students in New England often became targets of racist mobs.<sup>108</sup> Also, the mother stated her reasons for the child's return were because the father was sick and the mother wanted to see her.<sup>109</sup>

Obermann was the only person in the twenty-year period of notarial protocols (Ponce, 1810-1830), and other public or private documents researched, that would express he was the father of a slave child. I think very few child slaves during this time in Puerto Rico, the Caribbean, or America had a father or tutor with Obermann's concern for his daughter, who felt responsible for her well-being and education, and not only for the child but also for the freed mother. Very early during the child's life he gave the mother by will a lifetime maintenance allowance of 200 pesos per year to be executed after his death. He also provided her by testament a house and land in St.

<sup>108</sup> McManus, op. cit., 89.

<sup>109</sup> Pérez Vega, op. cit., "Juana María Escobales".

Thomas and stocks of a corporation in this island. This is very uncommon: an ex-slave and a woman owing stocks of a company in St. Thomas or in any part in America. Why St. Thomas? Juana María was a bozal who most probably was bought by Obermann in St. Thomas, since he had lived there while he was working with his cousin Charles T. Obermann (owner of one of the most prestigious merchant houses). It is interesting that Juana, as early as 1826, as a freed slave, was buying slaves in Ponce from the well-known slave trader Francisco M. Tristany. The slaves were all females, including children: an 11-year old girl, for whom she agreed to pay 250 pesos in 18 months; two of unknown age and price. Another girl of 14 from Africa bought in 300 pesos, whom she sold in a year for less money, 280 pesos. It seems as if she was paying a debt with the slave girl. Later, she bought a girl named Monserrate of 13 for 260 pesos and kept her.<sup>110</sup> Why did she want so many girls if she also owned adult-women? At that time, she didn't have any land to cultivate. Apparently, she wanted to speculate with the acquisitions and was trying to earn some money. Or, perhaps she wanted to free them when they would become adults, but I do not think that was her purpose. Who knows? Notwithstanding, her behavior as an ex-slave appeared unusual. Actually, it was not unusual her behavior, she was acting like a free, wealthy woman who wanted to own slaves. "Ironically", as Robert Shell refers to the freed slaves at the Cape, and similar in Puerto Rico: "the small free black population, once freed, behaved in certain respects like their former masters."<sup>111</sup>

All the traders in Puerto Rico were at the peak of their prosperity during the 1820s, particularly the ones in Ponce. Tristany, the most important trader of child slaves, was enjoying big profits, earning a lot of money, so he continued very active in the business. In 1821 he received a cargo of 200 bozales from the island of Guadalupe; his permit was not listed in the government records. In that year he sold one child and six men on credit for 2,000 pesos, which were paid in two years. The child was an 8-year-old girl; most probably she was sold for more or less 100 pesos, since she was sold in a group.<sup>112</sup> Why sell a girl so young? This could have been one of those cases I mentioned before, to be utilized as sex objects for luxury and pleasure. At this moment,

<sup>110</sup> Pérez Vega, *ibid.*, "Juana María Escobales".

<sup>111</sup> Shell, *op. cit.*, 413.

<sup>112</sup> PNP, III-3, 1823.

the law did not protect her, since the Reglamento sobre Esclavos was proclaimed later in 1826. It only prohibited the separation of children less than 3 years from their mother. Before 1826, children were unprotected by law and could be given or sold as young as newborns. Nevertheless, I found that after 1826, the people in general and even the traders and clergymen did not comply with the law. For instance, I encountered the selling of children after 1826 of less than the stated age: a 13-months-old infant girl sold in 1829.<sup>113</sup> Tristany, in 1823, sold 44 slaves, 28 were children from 6 to 12 years old, mostly boys. If each had a value of 200 pesos approximately, he got 5,600 pesos for the children. He sold them to well-known and important people of Ponce: Obermann, the Vargas Brothers, the Frenchman Pedro Gautier (administrator of Hacienda Quemado), the physician and planter Domingo Arévalo, the priests José Antonio Córdova and Dionisio de Meneses.<sup>114</sup> The Catholic religion must have given the child slaves access to alternative social networks offering new hope when they lived with clergymen. Generally, they would live in the city and would have more contact with free people and outsiders. The treatment received from the clergymen, presumably, was more considerate than from other elite groups. Despite of, we cannot disregard the fact that they could also have been used as sex objects.

From 1817 to 1823 there were no imports in Ponce, as stated in the official government shipment records (*Informe de entrada y salida de barcos*). Undoubtedly, this was because of the English-Spanish Treaty of 1817 and the prohibition of the slave trade during the Constitutional Period in Spain and the colonies, 1820-1823, when liberals opposed slavery. In whatever degree, illegal imports and the trade continued. Furthermore, the decrease of slaves' imports to a significant stage was ascribed to pirates (British and North American) capturing all the ships suspected carrying slaves to Puerto Rico. The pirates' ships, when seized off Puerto Rico's southern coast, were brought to the port of Ponce, where everything confiscated, including child slaves, were sold at public auctions.<sup>115</sup> Finally when government absolutism (Fernando VII, 1823-1833) was re-established in Puerto Rico, the authoritarian regime was back again with

<sup>113</sup> PNP, 253v, 1829; 152, 1830.

<sup>114</sup> PNP, 42v, 55, 67, 1822; 75, 112, 1823.

<sup>115</sup> Pérez Vega, Ivette "El apresamiento de barcos norteamericanos por corsarios españoles de Puerto Rico". San Juan, Puerto Rico: Homines, Universidad Interamericana de Puerto Rico, vol. 12, núm. 1-2, 1988-89.

Governor Captain Miguel De la Torre (1823-1837). He especially granted licenses to the most renowned negreros (slave traders) to sell their “cargoes of youth and children slaves” in Ponce and in other three municipalities, Guayama, Mayagüez and San Juan, in Puerto Rico.<sup>116</sup> Certainly, the decade from 1820 to 1830 was the period of the most intense slave trading in Puerto Rico’s history (Censos y Estadísticas). According to the Census during this time, there was an increase of 12,500 slaves in the island, which was probably higher, since slavers rarely disclosed all their imports.

## THE GREAT EVENT – THE MASSIVE INTRODUCTION OF SLAVES

In 1824, Spain again required the hacendados to secure permission for the introduction of slaves for their properties because, as they stated, they did not have enough slaves.<sup>117</sup> It was permitted only to hacendados, so the ones most benefited, again, were foreigners, who owned most of the plantations. Immediately, Fernando Obermann asked for 200 slaves and declared: “The slaves will be provided by a friend, I will keep some for myself and the rest I will sell to other hacendados”. The Vargas Brothers in their order for 200 slaves explained: “In the business relations we have in St. Thomas and other colonies, we have some interests [money, sugar, slaves] which can only be delivered in slaves, being so necessary because of the few slaves we have....”<sup>118</sup> Surely, both Obermann and the Vargas Brothers wanted the slaves for sale. The Vargas had received 140 slaves in 1819, and they were utilizing less than a hundred in their plantation.

Government restrictions on the importation of slaves show its opposition to let people, other than hacendados, to import slaves who were not going to be utilized for agriculture. Thus favorable for foreigners, since most of them were hacendados. Then, the slaveholders became the great landowners. Slaveholding reflected social as well as an economic standing, they were visible symbols of rank and distinction. The authorities in the Island were against the influx of slaves already seasoned or Creoles from the French islands, because it was said that many of them had been accused of

<sup>116</sup> Picó, Fernando, *Historia de Puerto Rico*. Río Piedras, Puerto Rico, Ediciones Huracán, 2006, 180.

<sup>117</sup> Pérez-Vega, op. cit., “Las grandes introducciones”.

<sup>118</sup> Ibid., 67. AGPR, FGE, *Esclavos y libertos. Solicitudes para introducir esclavos...*, Ponce, 1824-29, c. 62, leg. 1792.

political subversion in those islands. These slaves called in Puerto Rico the “dangerous ones from Martinique”, the local government barred them (the violent ones) from entering the island, because the Crown did not want any kind of revolt in the country. People thought that the ones from the Congo were better workers and to be trusted.<sup>119</sup> Since productivity determined the demand for slaves, men rather than women made up most of the working force. Even though women, young ones and children worked also in the fields, they did not play a significant role in the slave economy. The preference for males was reflected on the captains’ slaves ships orders “to buy no girls and few women”, and “buy boys and young men.”<sup>120</sup>

A total of 741 slaves for these people reached the port of Ponce in 1824. The only one who was not an hacendado was Tristany, who was granted a license for 300 slaves. In addition, a shipment of 149 slaves arrived in a Dutch schooner without permit and for an unknown consignee. However, there is the suspicion they were for Tristany, since he imported more than he should. He introduced under his name 450 slaves in 1824, instead of the 300 he was allowed. They came in different shipments. Only 67 were notarized sales for 17,030 pesos (250 pesos each); most of them were paid in cash, except a few bartered for houses and coffee. Thus he introduced 150 slaves without permission. Actually he had the government connections and relations to be able to import more than he was permitted. From his sales, therefore, I concluded that 383 slaves were paid for in cash, or they were sold outside of the area of Ponce and notarized in another town if they were sold on credit.<sup>121</sup> The cash sales usually meant that the slave would have a lower price. If a person didn’t notarize a sale, it was difficult for the authorities to know who the owner was, and it benefited him for tax duty. I doubt that Tristany’s slaves were sold outside the jurisdiction of Ponce because this area embraced a very large region with very bad connecting roads. It was easier to go by boat to other towns than by land. As expressed, people from the southern part of the island preferred to go to St. Thomas for commerce than to go to San Juan because of the poor road conditions and inland communications. Besides, the distance and the sea currents made the trip from Ponce to St. Thomas shorter and easier.

<sup>119</sup> Klein, op. cit., African Slavery, 146-7.

<sup>120</sup> McManus, op. cit., 38-9.

<sup>121</sup> Pérez Vega, op. cit., “La trata”.

Ponce became an important trading post, and people from all over the south and even from St. Thomas would come here to get commodities, including slaves. In the same year of 1824 the Vargas Brothers received a cargo of 200 slaves; in one month, 38 were sold notarized for 14,000 pesos (368 pesos each). The majority were to be paid in 18 months. Of these, 162 slaves should have been sold on a cash basis. Moreover, the San Juan slave trader Francisco Soler y Roch sold through a mediator 29 slaves in Ponce for 9,000 pesos (310 pesos each). If an important San Juan slave trader like Soler y Roch was selling slaves in Ponce it was because the latter was a better market. In total there was an entrance of 1,079 slaves in 1824. How many children arrived? It was not specified in the sales. Although, I believe many entered the area, since the Código sobre Esclavos (1826) had not yet been enforced in the island, making the trade and the treatment of child slaves very flexible, with practically no restrictions.<sup>122</sup>

Everybody in town during this decade was selling slaves, adults and children, including the church dignitaries, as Presbyter Dionisio de Meneses, mentioned before. In 1824 he sold a 5-to-6 year old negrito at 70 pesos, whom he had bought with his mother, in 1822; the mother was ex-changed for another woman slave.<sup>123</sup> It is hard to believe that a clergyman would be in this practice with children, and worse, to sell a child of this age without his mother. His action has to be independently viewed from the stipulation that it was prohibited by law. This situation gives us a clear picture of the mentality of the Catholic churchmen on this matter in Puerto Rico during the time, very similar to the attitude of clergymen in Brazil who would also sell children one-year of age or any age.<sup>124</sup>

The year 1825 was one of fast and lucrative slave sales. There were five traders selling slaves one after the other, as if it were timed. First, Tristany introduced 345 slaves with authorization from the government; of these, he sold only 65 notarized at 19,000 pesos (292 pesos each) and the rest on credit. There were 21 children (sex unspecified), including a 5-year old girl.<sup>125</sup> The buyers paid from 120 to 260 pesos per

<sup>122</sup> Pérez Vega, op. cit., "Las grandes introducciones".

<sup>123</sup> PNP, 173, 1824; 209, 1822.

<sup>124</sup> Conrad, op. cit., 112-113; Pérez Vega, Ivette, "La bendita esclavitud: compra-venta de esclavos por clérigos en Puerto Rico durante el siglo XIX". Simposio de 2008: Iglesia, Estado y Sociedad en Puerto Rico: Ruptura y Continuidad 1800-1868. Ponce, Puerto Rico: Pontificia Universidad Católica de Puerto Rico.

<sup>125</sup> PNP, 247-8, 1825.

child, aged 5 to 13. The children were mostly males, judging from the high prices, even though girls were appraised higher than years before. He also sold in cash 10 bozales boys for 1,200 pesos,<sup>126</sup> considered a low price, unless they were very young children. They had been given to Tristany in a libranza (warrant or order to pay a certain sum of money) by the businessman M. Lavoy from St. Thomas.

In two years, 1824-25, Tristany had introduced 800 slaves, although he was not an hacendado. In 1825 he sold bozales boys (unspecified quantity) to the priest Juan Antonio Mambrún on credit at an undetermined price. Since the churchman died in San Juan before paying his debt, Tristany asked his commercial representative at the Capital, to collect it.<sup>127</sup> The traders employed well-known merchants and attorneys from other areas in the island as representatives of their businesses, collecting debts and representing them in court, if it was necessary. Also, they were convenient sources of credit and mediators for the selling of slaves.

Then, the Vargas Brothers, during the year 1825, brought 49 slaves in a Dutch boat and sold 38 for 3,000 pesos (215 pesos each). Subsequently, the Italian transient merchant Miguel Saliva, of St. Thomas, language professor, who was new in the vicinity, imported 129 slaves in another Dutch boat, without any government permit. I think he was so impressed with the trade that he decided to stay. As expressed, Dutch trade was prohibited in the Caribbean, but the Dutch traders continued the slave trade, like everybody else. Saliva sold all the slaves on credit for 38,515 pesos (299 pesos each), to be paid in two to three years. There were 2 children from Cuba: one sold at 170 pesos, and the other at 195.<sup>128</sup> Next year, 1826, he sold in cash 6 children at 150 pesos each and, because of the price, must have been rather young<sup>129</sup>

Afterwards, the North Americans James Atkinson (unknown origin) from Cuba and Arthur Rogers (Rhode Island) from St. Thomas arrived and introduced 1,000 slaves in Ponce in two months from Martinique. Atkinson stated to the authorities, "I will introduce slaves for the ingenio..., and for the distribution among other hacendados." He kept only about 60 slaves with his partner Thomas Davidson. After some time,

<sup>126</sup> PNP, 16v-18, 1825.

<sup>127</sup> PNP, 22-3, 1825.

<sup>128</sup> PNP, 148, 149, 1825.

<sup>129</sup> PNP, 22, 1826.



Atkinson disappeared from the vicinity. Did he just come to make money? Indeed, Atkinson was related to a slave trade company in Cuba.<sup>130</sup>

In two months Atkinson and Rogers sold 644 notarized slaves in 72 sales at almost 100,000 pesos. There were 132 children. The slaves in lots from one to ninety were sold to a variety of people, mainly from other towns in the island and merchants from St. Thomas. The Irish planters the Archbald Brothers, established in Ponce, associated with Hammond & Newmann of Baltimore, also bought children (unknown quantity), but in a year they sold them due to the need of cash money<sup>131</sup>. This reflects how easy was to sell child slaves and how fast they changed owners, the seller never losing money in a sale or an exchange, even if it was the same day. The French investor Félix Dubois from St. Thomas bought the most. They sold: 420 men (65.3%) - 73,500 pesos (175 pesos each); 92 women (14.2%) -13,800 pesos (150 pesos each); 132 children (20.5%) - 16,500 pesos (125 pesos each). The total of imported slaves in notarized sales was 1, 523, including children, by Atkinson and Rogers<sup>132</sup>.

A clergyman, José Joaquín Sistiaga from another municipality in Puerto Rico (Barranquitas) obtained 26 slaves through his agent. They were mostly children, 14 (age and sex unspecified). He paid 5,284 pesos in cash for all the slaves.<sup>133</sup> Why did Sistiaga buy so many children? How could a priest have all this cash money to buy slaves? Probably, the child slaves bought by Sistiaga, who was also an hacendado, was with the purpose of utilizing them first in his house, and later in the sugar or coffee fields. Coffee planters preferred children because of their small hands to pick the coffee beans from the trees, so the leaves would not get damaged picking the fruit. Yet, I doubt that he wanted to protect and free so many children. Or perhaps he wanted to keep and train them as indentured servants until they were 25. If he acted like the clergyman and hacendado José Gutiérrez del Arroyo, who would only manumit his children's house slaves after his death or after his heiress (niece) death, then the Sistiaga's children, as slaves, would still have a long time to work. As stated before, prior to 1826, child slaves would be freed anytime at any age; afterwards it was prohibited by law, but it went on. Maybe the Catholic Church gave the slave access to a better way of living and more

<sup>130</sup> Pérez Vega, op. cit., "Las grandes introducciones".

<sup>131</sup> PNP, 69-69v, 1826; 126, 1827.

<sup>132</sup> Pérez Vega, op. cit., "Las grandes introducciones".

<sup>133</sup> PNP, 253-4, 1825.

alternatives to be freed in the near future. It seems that Puerto Rico had a low manumission rate during the period studied, similar to other places in America, like Cuba and Brazil.

In 1823, the physician Domingo Arévalo, a Venezuelan immigrant and planter, freed a 5-year old girl, María Concepción, with the condition that she would have her freedom when his wife died. Many years would have to pass by for this girl to be free, since apparently, Mrs. Arévalo was not sick or going to die soon. In 1830 Mrs. Arévalo was still alive. Two years afterwards, in 1825, the girl's mother, the slave Francisca, was going to be sold by Arévalo, but Francisca objected that the girl would stay by herself to live with the Arévalos. She declared in a judicial document submitted at the Tribunal de Justicia de Ponce or Ponce Court of Justice by the mayor of the municipality that, instead, she wanted her daughter to be sold to the mayor of Ponce for 160 pesos cash.<sup>134</sup> The law protected the child slave if the mother declared that she thought the girl was not going to be properly treated or taken care of, or with cruelty. The mother could choose another master for the child, and the price would be stated by a slave appraiser of the court.<sup>135</sup> Another interesting case is the one that took place in San Juan in 1826. Eduvigis, a 2-year-old slave and her mother's in-born child (who would be her new-coming brother/sister) would get their freedom when their owner or master died, with the condition that it would be granted when they became adults<sup>136</sup> Then, Eduvigis would have to continue 23 years more with the master as an indentured servant and the inborn child 25 years, since the mother was not manumitted and would stay in slavery. This occurred at the end of the year when Reglamento sobre Esclavos of 1826 was promulgated, and for unknown reasons these slaves were not protected by the new law, even though it took place in the Capital city where laws were rigidly enforced, than in other regions of the island. The situation shows again that people did not always comply with the established law.

The slaves introduced in Ponce by the five traders mentioned during the two years period, 1824-1825, numbered 2,602. They sold 1,000, notarized slaves for approximately 200,000 pesos. If the ones that were not notarized (1,592) were sold in

<sup>134</sup> PNP, 247-8, 1825.

<sup>135</sup> Flinter, op. cit., 38.

<sup>136</sup> PNSJ, 466, 1826.

cash for not less than 200 pesos each, the total for the slaves would have amounted to 320,400 pesos. There were 60 child negritos (up to 14 years old) and “young ones” (up to 18 years old) of both sexes sold at 12,000 pesos (200 pesos each).<sup>137</sup> Proust, a physician from France, living in Ponce, related to J. Proust, captain of a slave trade ship in Nantes, became a successful slave trader. Proust and Arévalo are examples of physicians who abandoned their profession in Ponce and proceeded to business, slave trading and sugar, because of the profits they would get. The same happened with the pharmacists, like Gaspar Duprel, who also left their professions and became planters and traders.<sup>138</sup>

Next year, after the enormous number of slave sales during 1825-1826, the slave uneasiness was tense in the haciendas with the inconvenience of so many of them crammed in the barracones not having enough space. Apparently, this was one of the reasons for the notorious upheaval of many slaves, mainly bozales, from different haciendas in the municipality. It was denounced to the government authorities by Antonio, one of Obermann’s slaves. Finally, the unexpected occurred, the capturing of more than 30 slaves, most of them sentenced to death, others to life imprisonment, and the granting of freedom to the informer, thus a reward of 25 pesos<sup>139</sup>. No children or young ones less than 16 years old were involved in the incident. At this moment, large numbers of slaves should have been available for hire because of the need of slaves at the haciendas, and some masters made a business of hiring slaves out.

Newspapers notices of slaves were offered for hire in the North (U.S.). Sometimes slaves were rented along with a business. Slave-hiring was particularly common among people who needed labor, including children, but did not want the responsibilities of ownership. Black workers could be hired from their masters with all the flexibility of free labor whether the service was for days, months or a year. Hirers provided the slave with room and board, while the owner was responsible for his clothing. They found it profitable to rent their services rather than to have free workers. When the hiring was for longer than a week, a formal contract was usually signed

<sup>137</sup> PNP, 231-2, 256v-266v, 273, 1829; 16-18, 35-35v, 1830.

<sup>138</sup> Pérez-Vega, Ivette, “Physicians and Pharmacists in Puerto Rico during the Wars of Independence, 1810-1830”. *Revista de la Asociación Médica de Puerto Rico*, vol. 101, núm. 4, oct.-dic. 2009. Pérez Vega, Ivette, “Médicos y farmacéuticos en el comercio de esclavos en Puerto Rico: Ponce, 1815-1830”. *San Juan, Puerto Rico: Revista de la Asociación Médica de Puerto Rico*, vol. 102, núm. 4, oct.-dic. 2010.

<sup>139</sup> Baralt, op. cit., 66-7.

specifying the work, the wage, and the hirer's responsibility for the slave. There was no labor need that hired slaves did not fill. Slaves hired by day usually lived at home of their owners who supported them. The hiring rates provided owners with an excellent return on their investment. Slaves generally returned from 40 to 60 percent of their market value because of the high-appraised value of the slaves during the 19<sup>th</sup> Century.<sup>140</sup>

Between 1827 and 1829 the French slave traders Duprel & Saubot, who arrived in Ponce from Cumaná (Venezuela) and Martinique, respectively, invested 14,000 pesos in slaves. They sold 154 notarized bozales for almost 50,000 pesos (325 pesos each), to be paid on credit in one year, from 1829 to 1830. In 1829 Ventura Fornaguera, a Catalanian merchant bought a 13-month-old infant girl, María de la o, at 50 pesos; her mother had been sold before. Within one year, the girl was sold by Fornaguera to the owner of the mother at 100 pesos cash.<sup>141</sup> Was this an altruistic action of Fornaguera, or was it an act of compassion of the man who bought the mother first, and later acquired the girl, because, probably, he wanted to have them together? To any case, Fornaguera doubled his gain in less than a year. It is uncommon to find a merchant buying and selling an infant without the mother in such a short time. As stated before, since 1826 the authorities had prohibited the separation of children aged 3 years or younger from their mothers, showing that the government order had become a dead law.

In 1830 child slaves were higher in price, especially girls; Rosa, a 14-year old Creole and Elisa a 16-year old, were sold at 300 pesos each, but Gerónimo a 15-year old from Africa, was sold at 250 pesos plata by the wealthy Spanish-Canarian planter Gregorio de Medina.<sup>142</sup> He was Arthur Rogers' father-in-law, and owner of Hacienda Vayas, having "a hundred and fifty negroes valued at one hundred and fifty thousand dollars" (underlined on document).<sup>143</sup> The same day, the boy was bought again by another local planter at approximately 275 pesos.<sup>144</sup> The Creoles were supposed to be

<sup>140</sup> McManus, op. cit., 45-50.

<sup>141</sup> PNP, 253v-254v, 1829; 152-3, 1830.

<sup>142</sup> PNP, 239-239v, 1830.

<sup>143</sup> Walker, Charles, op. cit., 43; Pérez-Vega, Ivette, "La presencia de canarios en el sur de Puerto Rico, siglo XIX". Manuel Morales Padrón, editor, Actas X Congreso Internacional de Historia Canaria Americana, Casa Colón, Gran Canaria, Islas Canarias, España, 1994.

<sup>144</sup> PNP, 221v-222v, 1830.

cheaper in the island, but they were getting expensive, since many people preferred them because, as stated before, they were somehow fearful of the slaves from Africa.

## COMMENTS

The 1830 Puerto Rico Government Census (Censo y Estadísticas) recorded a total population of 400,000. The island imported 12,000 to 12,500 slaves between 1820 and 1830 (1,000 per year). Many slaves must have arrived in Puerto Rico by fraudulent channels to evade government taxes. Not all of them stayed in the same region or municipality, an unknown number must have been transferred to other areas to work outside their jurisdiction. As it is stated in the Census of 1830, there were 24,000 slaves in Puerto Rico; approximately 3,500 (21.5%) in the municipality of Ponce. More than 12,000 people in the municipality were free, for a population of 16,000. Likewise, many slaves could have been in Ponce but not registered in the Census; many children were not recorded by the government until they were considered grown-ups to work in the fields or 18-years old. As demonstrated, many were sold to perform different tasks in agriculture before the authorized age. Still many more must have been put up for sale on a cash-basis in the absence of legal papers. Certainly, it was also a rampant child market without restraint. Everybody in Puerto Rico, including freed slaves and clergymen, would buy or sell child slaves. I did not find in the research work an owner freeing a child slave without conditions.

I considered that a high number of slave children were sold by local traders. I deduced that more must have been introduced in the island, because many who were never registered must have been kept by the traders for their own service in their households. The figures would not include the ones that were already living in the haciendas or in households. Why this interest in child slaves? In any market they were cheaper. It was easier to break-up a child's family and cultural ties, so his forced acculturation in America would be most effective. It was easier to train a child than an adult in the plantation system, which would mean more benefit for sugar production and profit even though, it would cost more to take care of a child for a long period of time. Furthermore, we have to take into account that Puerto Rico became the second sugar producer after Cuba in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century, so the country needed a considerable

number of slaves. A child occupied less space in a ship, despite the fact the cost of shipment was almost the same as for an adult; a boy of 10 to 12 would drink more than a gallon of water, more than an adult, and water was an expensive item in a ship, thus many captains did not want them. Apparently the child had less tolerance for the trip, since many died. Infants and children were affected by many diseases and other conditions: sea-sickness, diarrhea, fever, colds, whooping cough, teething, yaws, worms, injuries.

I did not find any shortage of slaves in Ponce during the time the children were imported; there were no restrictions for the trade, even after 1826 with the proclamation of the *Reglamento sobre Esclavos*. There was still a very profitable slave trade going on with Africa which was supposed to end in 1840, but it continued, also, in the Caribbean Islands, like Martinique, Guadeloupe,<sup>145</sup> and Cuba; also, Brazil. To all appearances, the high demand for "good" slaves in Cuba obliged the slave traders to bring the *negrillos* to Puerto Rico. Surely, the *negrillos* would be the most exploitable ones, since they would have more years to work. In a few years they would be adults rendering more in a longer time of daily work. A longer life for a slave meant greater profitability for the business.

Since the abolition of the slave trade in Africa in 1807 (also, in North America and most of the European countries), the traders in all of these countries wanted to get the most out of the trade, even if it was illegal. This caused the increase of slaves in America, especially Cuba and Puerto Rico, during the time studied. Fearing the impending emancipation of slaves over all the continents and the abolition of the trade in the Spanish and Portuguese colonies, people wanted to sell as many slaves as they could at any price. The 19th Century export from Africa to America (1817-1843) was primarily from the Northern Congo, Angola and Mozambique. The highest number of slave imports in Cuba and, obviously, in Puerto Rico, from 1817 to 1843, were of Mozambican origin. The slave trade had to reach for new slaves deeper, into the African interior. On the coast of Africa, there was a considerable decline of available adult slaves between the African abolition of the trade and the emancipation period (1807 to 1833) but, at the same time, the slave coast had an increase of slave children and indentured servants. If the region had such a surplus of them, the people involved in

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<sup>145</sup> Debien, op. cit..

the trade most have thought to dispose of the children by selling them to the oceanic slavers. Although there was a great demand for children on the slave coast for rural and urban work (all kinds of work) as indentured servants, there was also a great demand for slaves from the Caribbean, especially Cuba, and Brazil. On the other hand, "the British naval patrol [after the abolition of slave trade in Africa] embarked on a vigorous hunt for a new labor supply in the form of illegal shipments of slaves to the Americas".<sup>146</sup> A considerable number must have been children, since there was a scarcity of adult slaves in the region, except women. The women would be retained for reproducing more children. The only available slaves in large numbers would have been children; many should have been illegally exported to America by different means. As an example, in 1830 a ship from Africa went to Brazil with a "cargo of children".<sup>147</sup> How many were shipped? It was not stated, but there were many, since it was a whole cargo that arrived from Africa. There must have been more than 250 or 300 which constituted an adult cargo, since children needed less space in the ship. Various ships from Africa, particularly from the southeast region, those that were going to Brazil would go afterwards to the Caribbean to deliver the surplus of slaves.<sup>148</sup> At the beginning of the 19th Century, the child slave population in Brazil was high, especially in the mining area Vila Rica de Ouro Prieto;<sup>149</sup> 22.5% of the slave population was under 15-years old.<sup>150</sup> Considering there was such high number of child slaves in Brazil, most probably the slave traders exported a good number of them to the Caribbean, and eventually, from 1818 to 1830, many must have arrived in Puerto Rico. After 1835, since traders expected the slave trade to be stopped at any time, all who would be enslaved were brought over by them for the years to come: even children.

During the 19<sup>th</sup> Century the people of Puerto Rico were living basically under the arbitrary attitude of men and not under the rule of law. The despotism or autocratic position of the governors was more powerful than the law. Our judicial system existed

<sup>146</sup> Thompson, op. cit., 275.

<sup>147</sup> Russell-Wood, A.J.R., *The Black Man in Slavery and Freedom in Colonial Brazil*. London: Macmillan Press, 1982, 117

<sup>148</sup> Curtin, Philip D., op. cit., *Economic Change*, 238.

<sup>149</sup> Ramos, Donald, "City and Country: The Family in Minas Gerais, 1802-1838". Carleton University, Canada, *Journal of Family History*, 111-4 (Winter 1978), 361-75, 119. Ramos, Donald, "Vila Rica: Profile of a Colonial Brazilian Urban Center". Philadelphia, *The Americas XXXX*, 4 (April 1979), 495-526.

<sup>150</sup> Russell-Wood, op. cit., 125.

in a placid ignorance of human rights and protective legislation, especially for slaves, primarily the children. Precisely, the Reglamento sobre Esclavos of 1826 was issued for the protection of slaves, but, generally, the people did not comply with the order; the government was not interested in its observance. The possession of slaves was not in accordance to the obeisance of the decree.

Thus, the law, in general, lost its sense of majesty or grandeur or justice; it became variable, capricious, arbitrary, senseless: dead. It was not, anymore, a principle for the protection of the common individuals:<sup>151</sup> as a rule of conduct or action established by custom or laid down by a governing authority. Instead, the people and the governing body saw the law not only as an instrument of power and control, but also, of fear and oppression. The deprivation of human rights, liberties, integrity and dignity of children slaves, who were the most affected, continued up to 1873, when the abolition of slavery was finally declared in Puerto Rico, but staying afterwards as indentured servants for their masters not less than three years, with money indemnity for the owners because of their lost of capital. Ultimately, the freed slaves would have all their rights as citizens, only after five years had elapsed. Children slaves born after 1868 of women slaves would be freed after the proclamation of the Moret Law was ordered on September 17, 1868, also, accompanied with the owners' compensation to their loss. The other freed children would have to stay in servitude for more years to come, until they would be 22-years old.<sup>152</sup>

Slavery consisted not only in being deprived of freedom and of visibility, as expressed by Hannah Arendt, "that from being obscure, they [slaves] should pass away leaving no trace that they have existed". "Through violent oppression in a slave society or exploitation...., it can be channeled in such a way that the labor of some suffices for the life of all".<sup>153</sup> Therefore, the work of slaves, inclusive children, guaranteed the wealth, consumption and the advantageous life of the owners.

<sup>151</sup> Trías Monge, José, El sistema judicial en Puerto Rico. Río Piedras (Puerto Rico): Editorial de la Universidad de Puerto Rico, 1978.

<sup>152</sup> Díaz Soler, op. cit. Zavala Trías, Sylvia, Antepasados Esclavos, Ponce, P.R., 2011; <http://freepages.genealogy.rootsweb.ancestry.com>.

<sup>153</sup> Arendt, op. cit., 55, 88)



## NOTE

I want to thank Dr. M. Charlotte Ward (Graduate Program in Translation, Humanities Faculty, University of Puerto Rico, Río Piedras) for editing this paper; to Marie Soler, Esq., and Magalis Cintrón, librarian (History Research Center) for their commentaries. To all my gratitude.

## PRIVAÇÃO DE DIREITOS HUMANOS, DE LIBERDADES, DE INTEGRIDADE E DE DIGNIDADE: ESCRAVIDÃO EM PORTO RICO, SÉCULO XIX. UM INFERNO PARA CRIANÇAS

### Resumo

Durante o século XIX o povo de Porto Rico vivia submetido à atitude arbitrária dos homens, e não em um Estado de Direito. O despotismo, ou a posição autocrática dos governadores, era mais poderoso do que a lei. Nosso sistema judicial existia em uma plácida ignorância aos direitos humanos e à legislação de proteção, especialmente para os escravos, principalmente as crianças. Assim, a lei, em geral, perdeu seu senso de majestade ou grandeza ou justiça; tornou-se variável, caprichosa, arbitrária, sem sentido: morta. Não foi, mais, um princípio para a proteção dos indivíduos comuns: uma regra de conduta ou ação estabelecida pelo costume ou estabelecida por uma autoridade de governo. Em vez disso, o povo e o corpo diretivo enxergavam a lei não apenas como um instrumento de poder e controle, mas também, de medo e opressão. A privação dos direitos humanos, das liberdades, da integridade e da dignidade das crianças escravas, que eram as mais afetadas, continuou até 1873, quando a abolição da escravatura foi finalmente declarada em Porto Rico.

**Palavras chave:** legislação do escravo, medo e opressão, direitos humanos, escravidão infantil.

### DOCUMENTAL RECORDS:

Puerto Rico General History Archive - AGPR (Archivo General de Puerto Rico)

Notarial Protocols (Records):

Municipality of San Juan:

PNSJ, f. 466, 1826

Municipality of Ponce:

PNP, fs: 150-153, 1820; 94v-100, 1824; 111-113, 1823; 42v, 55,67,1822; 75, 112, 1823; 173, 1824; 209, 1822; 247, 248, 1825; 16v-18, 1825; 22-23, 1825; 148, 149, 1825; 231, 232, 256v-266v, 273,

1830; 16-18, 35, 35v, 1830; 253-254, 1825; 466, 1826; 253-254, 1825; 69-69v, 1826; 127, 1826; 466, 1826; 253v, 254v, 1829; 152, 153, 1830; 209-209v, 239-239v, 1830; 221v-222v, 1830; 247-248, 1825.

Spanish Governors' Records - FGE (Fondo de Gobernadores Españoles)

Extranjeros

Solicitudes para introducir esclavos

Entrada y salida de barcos

Asuntos Políticos y Civiles

Inmigrantes

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*Trabalho enviado em 12 de fevereiro de 2015.*

*Aceito em 12 de fevereiro de 2015*