

# Methods in Caribbean Anthropological Research: A Re-consideration

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## RÉSUMÉ

L'article réévalue les cadres théoriques et les approches méthodologiques qui ont prévalu dans les recherches socio-anthropologiques dans les Caraïbes, recherches qui ont été implicitement influencées par la théorie des "sociétés pluralistes". L'auteur insiste sur les faiblesses suivantes de ces recherches:

- a) elles ignorent le matériel des archives,
- b) elles acceptent des thèses comme "les origines culturelles africaines" ou le "déterminisme économique" pour expliquer, par exemple, la fréquence des unions de droit commun, ou
- c) elles s'appuient sur la thèse de "la classe inférieure en tant que normative" sans traiter le système de valeur de la société globale.

L'auteur suggère un élargissement des procédures de recherche pour considérer le système social entier dans lequel les phénomènes apparaissent aussi bien que la nature des sources de données accessibles.

## INTRODUCTION

For some decades now, the Caribbean region has been the focus of extensive anthropological research particularly by North American-based researchers. The general methods adopted in the study of the societies and cultures of this area are basically those of traditional anthropological fieldwork for investigation of remote, homogenous, "small-scale", pre-literate societies. However, insufficient recognition has been given to the significant differences in these respective field situations.

It would appear methodologically obvious that fundamentally different social situations with radically different principles of social organization would call for different field research approaches, yet this has not been the

case with Caribbean ethnology. To begin with, there is the question of “units of research” constituting the “social structure” of any given society that one selects for study. Unlike New Guinea, or Africa, or Amazonia, the population segments studied in the Caribbean are neither “tribes” nor simple autonomous societal units, nor are they “indigenes”, but are sub-cultures within a complex of socio-economic, political and cultural systemic order, the structure of which encompasses diverse population categories defined in ethnic and colour terms. Secondly, these societies are literate and possess written historical and contemporary records in languages not unfamiliar to anthropological field researchers. Consequently, from a qualitative point of view, Caribbean ethnography ought to reflect a higher standard of reliability, validity and replicability than work done among those pre-literate societies of traditional anthropological concern.

The epistemological issue here is whether conventional field methods devised for the type of societies traditionally studied by anthropologists can be considered adequate for the kinds of societies discussed in this paper. In other words, could a study of constituent segments of a complex Caribbean society conducted in isolation from the overall cultural configuration claim to be a valid reflection of what is termed a “Caribbean Society” in the resultant report? Holism is one of the sacred canons of the empirical method in anthropology; so a study of a subcultural segment of a Caribbean society is no more than just that – a sectional study of an atom of the whole which leaves a host of other questions unanswered about that society. A case in point is the study of extra-marital mating patterns in Caribbean family research. Much of the literature on this subject reflects the heavy influence of conventional anthropological methods for the study of conjugal and kinship units among pre-literate, often kin-based societies.<sup>1</sup>

Virtually all studies of family patterns and organization are confined to the “Afro-West Indian lower class” segment of Caribbean societies, and in a few cases, the East Indian peasantry. This sectional bias in unit selection leaves a large part of the society unconsidered. Very few studies have taken the “elites” or the “middle class” (white, coloured or black) as the focus on the investigation, either in their own right or for purposes of comparison.

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<sup>1</sup> See for example the attempt to analyse Caribbean family structures in terms of the kinship approach in: William Davenport, “The Family System of Jamaica”, *Soc. & Econ. Studies* (10) 1961 pp. 420-454; Michael G. Smith, “Kinship and Household in Carriacou”, *Soc. & Econ. Studies* (10) 1961, pp. 455-477; Remy Bastien, “Hatian Rural Family Organization”, *Soc. & Econ. Studies* (10) 1961 pp. 478-510.

There are marked discontinuities even where attempts have been made to draw a historical and comparative development of mating patterns among the constituent segments.

### THEORETICAL APPROACHES

The bankruptcy of the plural society theory is a pertinent point. This theory treated segments of Caribbean societies as if they were *parallel, non-complementary* cultural systems that could be studied as discrete, autonomous social units as one would treat a "tribal" society. The incipient influence of this theory has led many researchers to treat, in practice, the social segments they select for investigation as if they were indeed holistic societies. Following M. G. Smith's pluralist ideas,<sup>2</sup> they approach and describe the cultural practices of a population segment of a given society as if it were a full-blown cultural system rather than a subculture of the social whole. Yet it is known that all Caribbean cultural practices are a conglomerate of elements contributed by the various immigrant groups (there being no indigenous culture among those) who make up present-day inhabitants in most territories.

I have argued elsewhere (Manyoni, 1977, 1980) that we cannot begin to adequately explain particular behaviour patterns among West Indian societies unless we take cognizance of the dominant cultural ethos encompassing all segments. All population segments in the Caribbean derive their ethos from the experience of plantation social organization and from the culture that developed in consequence of slavery. The prevailing cultural patterns, family structures, mating practices and value systems are teleologically linked to the pervasive plantation socio-economic system which created them in the first place three centuries ago. By "plantation socio-economic system", it should be understood to mean the total social structure composed of all the constituent segments whose relations were inexorably shaped by the plantation productive enterprise. Behavioural patterns that emerged from the interplay of intergroup relations within the plantation system were influenced by a value system shared by the society as a whole, notwithstanding the manifestation of particular elements peculiar to the discrete segments.

I suggest that M. G. Smith's postulated notion of institutional pluralism is wrong, and woefully inadequate as a heuristic device for analysing sub-

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<sup>2</sup> M. G. Smith's postulates on this theme are contained in his various publications: 1953, 1960, 1961, 1965a, 1965b, and with Leo Kuper (1969).

cultural patterns or practices in Caribbean societies. For example, the theory has considerable difficulty in explaining the cultural basis for the notion of the "coloured creole" institutional autonomy (Smith 1960: 767, 1965a: 4, 235; 1965b: 112). Once a society is defined as "plural" on the basis of cultural or institutional diversity, it then becomes imperative to demonstrate how the various institutions are structurally arranged within the social system. If these units are in fact closed, non-complementary and parallel sub-systems, then we do by definition have pluralism. However, if they are merely a variation of the dominant cultural ethos, then we simply have sub-cultures within a commonly shared system of values.<sup>3</sup>

What most writers on Caribbean (sectional) cultural practices have treated as 'differing institutional cultural systems' (Smith, 1960: 767), are in fact complementary rather than alternate or opposed 'exclusive (and) ... distinctive systems of action, ideas, values, and social relations', nor do they entail the 'co-existence of incompatible institutional systems' (Smith, 1965: 4). There appears to be no justifiable methodological or theoretical reason for regarding the co-existence of differing social practices among population segments of most Caribbean societies as evidence of synchronic and full blown parallel systems.

The evolution of Caribbean cultural forms entailed a synthesis of many diverse elements, none of which enjoyed independent existence for any length of time after the crystallization of Creole society in the 17th century plantation milieu. Since slavery was never an independent institution peculiar to the slave segment, the social practices of the slaves similarly were not, and could not have been, voluntary and exclusive institutional behaviour that could be analysed independently of the social environmental context. This observation applies equally to the position of the "Free Coloured Creoles". Any sociological analysis of their behaviour or social position would need to take account of their relationship to the total social system consisting of masters and slaves, whites and blacks if it is to make ethnographic sense.<sup>4</sup> To argue, as Smith (1965: 112) does, that Caribbean

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<sup>3</sup> The point is brilliantly enunciated by Lee Rainwater in his "The Problem of Lower Class Culture", *Journ. of Soc. Issues* 26 (2) 1970, pp. 133-148, following Goode's (1960) now classic challenge of the normative thesis then prevailing among Caribbeanists about common-law unions. See also H. Rodman, "The lower class value stretch", *Social Forces* 42 (2) 1963; and his: *Lower-Class Families*, London,oup. 1971.

<sup>4</sup> It should be noted that the intermediate position of the "Free Coloured People" was a structural and social status deriving directly from the very nature of plantation society. They shared all the values of plantation society including the institution of slavery itself. Their

societies are plural by virtue of an assumed existence of incompatible institutional systems which leads to each sector practising "different cultures", is to fly in the face of ethnographic facts. The coloured segment of Caribbean populations was and is entirely Creole by birth, culture and behaviour; it could in no way be assumed to have at any point in time practised a "different culture" or adhered to "different institutions" distinct from those governing the society as a whole. Similarly, the institutions developed by the white segments of the population and the practices prevailing among its members were by their nature largely Creole, influenced as they were by the totality of the slave system of which they were an integral part.

Earlier I alluded to the question of mating patterns in the Caribbean which I think demonstrates the inadequacy of research approaches that focus on a single segment of these societies. The white Creole segment was as implicated in these practices as the other segments of the society and thus should be the subject of comparative research. The habit of field researchers on family and kinship structures to concentrate on "lower-class negro" behaviour to the exclusion of other constituent segments and status levels prevents a more comprehensive understanding of these patterns. This focus on non-efficient causes leads to ineffectual "explanations", erroneous paradigms and misleading data bases (Manyoni, 1977: 418). So long as field researchers appear to be implicitly wedded to the plural society notion of West Indian social systems, the result can only be further obfuscation of the research problem.

### METHODOLOGICAL CONCERNS

Let me illustrate with concrete examples the charges I am making about the shortcomings of present research procedures. Schlesinger (1968a; 1968b), in reviewing the extensive body of literature on family patterns in Jamaica and in the English-speaking Caribbean, has aptly summarized the major "findings" of nineteen studies by twenty-two investigators for the period 1943-1956, and tabulated their sample units by geographic location (rural-urban), population numbers, and social status of the unit selected for study, together with their respective methods of data collection

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intermediate position is well portrayed in Jerome S. Handler, *The unappropriated People: Freedmen in the Slave Society of Barbados*, 1974, and David W. Cohen and J. P. Greene, *Neither Slave Nor Free*, 1972. It should be remembered that the "coloureds" are the true creoles, not having any other cultural roots like their white and black counterparts.

(1968a: 137; 1968b: 150). Interestingly enough, the social unit selected for all but six of the nineteen studies is described as "lower social class", and of the total studies, only six include "urban location" in their samples. As to method of data collection, seven out of ten studies utilized census data only, four employed questionnaire interviews, and only two combined interviews and observation. Obviously other sources and methods of data retrieval which could have thrown more light on these mating behaviours were neglected at the cost of validity.

Virtually for all the former plantation slave territories in the Caribbean, there are extensive documentary records in existence relating to, among other things, marital issues throughout the slavery and post-slavery period. These materials could, and do shed considerable light on the origins and persistence of contemporary mating patterns. I refer here to various local legislative enactments relating to the slaves' legal and civil fetters against contracting formal conjugal ties; to Registers of Marriages, Births and Divorces, Legitimacy Registers, Reports and Correspondence on plantation affairs in British State Papers, Colonial Reports (Blue Books), Ecclesiastical Correspondence of the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts (SPG), and Royal Commissions of Inquiry: Proceedings and Reports (see Manyoni, 1980: 88-89fn.; Bennett, 1958; Klingberg, 1983). I suggest that a careful utilization of such valuable sources of historical and contemporary data could help strengthen the partially substantiated findings and largely intuitive conclusions of field researchers.<sup>5</sup>

Even where the researchers' intuition suggests a plausible explanation, this is often not supported by the sort of data that would provide an external test of validity for the explanation proffered. Henriques (1953: 27), for example, in a fit of intellectual intuition suggests that the direct encouragement of promiscuity by the planters was sufficient to establish a cultural pattern which has existed to the present day. However, he fails to provide or ignores the concrete historical data that would validate this insightful explanation, nor does he attempt to explain why the pattern has persisted more than a century after the postulated causal conditions had changed. A search in the archives would have furnished the necessary supporting material. At times intellectual myopia prevents a researcher from perceiving

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<sup>5</sup> See for example a move in this direction in: Robert Dirks and Virginia Kerns, "Mating patterns and adaptive change in Rum Bay, 1823-1970", *Soc. & Econ. Studies* 25 (10) 1976, pp. 34-54. See also Norma Forde, "The Evolution of Marriage Law in Barbados" *JBMHS* 35, 1975, pp. 35-46.

the very context of his/her investigative concern in historical and structural terms. For example, Kerr (1963: 202) concludes for her Jamaica study that it is a fallacy to transplant social institutions (marriage) from England or American and expect them to take root in a different cultural pattern in an unaltered form. She begins from the mistaken assumption that there was indeed a different cultural pattern in existence in the West Indies to which alien institutions (social or otherwise) could have been transplanted. There was nothing that could be called "West Indian culture" prior to plantation slavery and the colonization of these islands.

It is thus woefully inaccurate to suggest that the failure of the monogamous, legally sanctioned form of marital union to preponderate in Jamaica or elsewhere in the West Indies was due to cultural incompatibility. Had Kerr made an ideographic comparative study of the other constituent segments and social categories in Jamaica, she would have recognized the patent invalidity of her conclusions. The historical record is replete with commentaries on how strikingly incompatible were the mating behaviours among the white Creoles with the prevailing patterns of their metropolitan European counterparts throughout the plantation period.<sup>6</sup>

A further methodological shortcoming in family studies is the tendency among most researchers to lump together otherwise discrete issues relating to mating patterns, sexual behaviour and procreation in their analyses. Although these three subjects are taxonomically related, they are analytically discrete phenomena. There is no necessary connection between the prevalence of common-law unions and the prevalence of illegitimacy or the rate of illegitimate births. A sequential link between the incidence of consensual unions and the rate of sexual reproduction is not a matter for intellectual speculation, but a research problem that calls for an analytical demonstration of the alleged link. These separate variables within the mating complex that characterizes Caribbean family studies are often treated indiscriminately in efforts to portray an otherwise unsubstantiated developmental cycle of domestic units. Davenport (1961: 429), without strong demonstrable evidence, makes what amounts to a nomothetic explanation of the sequential development from initial sexual experimentation to procreation and to consensual union. One could avoid this sort of "impressionistic sociologising" if data relating to sexuality are first separated

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<sup>6</sup> Among the numerous commentators on white creole behaviours are Dickson (1789, 1814); Nugent (1839); Lewis (1834); Schomburgk (1848); Southey (1827); Sewell (1862); Caldecott (1898); Moreton (1790); Carmichael (1833).

from those relating to conjugality, and those pertaining to maternity with or without cohabitation.

Ebanks, *et al.* (1974) have demonstrated with statistical evidence the falsity of the assumption "that the typical pattern of union formation is from non-legal forms to marriage within the same partnership" (p. 243). From their extensive analysis of statistical data from interviews and questionnaire material, they found "no evidence in support of the notion that women progress from a visiting to commonlaw to married status" (p. 242-3); and that the popular contention of sequential progression has 'no empirical basis whatever' (p. 245). What in fact these authors found was that 'more than six of every ten women had marriages which occurred without a prior commonlaw status' (p. 243); and that 'only three per cent ... went through such a progression' (p. 243).

The work done by these researchers makes an important methodological contribution in another way: it not only recognizes the analytic rationality of treating the institution of marriage, family structure and child birth as distinct entities, but also controverts the popular notion that these three factors are explainable in terms of lower-class normative values systems (Rodman, 1966, Davenport, 1961; Kerr, 1961). The unquestioned preponderance of consensual unions over formal legal marriage is not explainable by resort to unsubstantiated claims that "lower-class" (black) individuals *prefer* such unions because they are commensurate with their normative value system. The findings of Ebanks *et al.* (*op. cit.*) for Barbados is applicable to other Caribbean societies in respect of the acceptance of legal marriage as a norm, notwithstanding failure to conform. According to Ebanks *et al.* (1974),

Marriage is widely sought by men and women since it provides security for both parties as well as considerable prestige and self-esteem (p. 231).

Otterbein (1965) in collating research on family patterns up to the early 1960s rightly points out what ought to be the methodological thrust of such endeavours.

The problem ... is to explain that variability which occurs among Caribbean family systems. ... It is not sufficient merely to describe the attributes and dimensions of such systems; rather it is also necessary to *locate and identify the conditions and factors within the sociocultural system which account for the variability* (p. 66, emphasis added).

More than a decade later Mariam K. Slater echoed the same methodological point with reference to her study of family forms in Martinique. 'Every region seems to produce its own variation on these two themes [illegitimacy



and matrifocality] and the forms display such diversity that one is tempted to seek some underlying process that would explain them' (1977: 16).

The methodological rationale for such differentiation of the analytic problem is precisely that there are two different aspects involved in mating: one relates to *sexual behaviour* with its corollary of *extra-marital births*, and the other involves *marital conjugality* which relates to *forms of unions*, and this may or may not have anything to do with the incidence and rate of "illegitimate" births. Researchers have not provided satisfactory evidence to support those assumptions that link pre-marital child birth with the prevalence of non-marital cohabitation. The problems are analytically separate as witness the high incidence of pre-marital (illegitimate) births in Scandinavian countries and lately in Britain and Canada but which have no correlation with common-law unions.<sup>7</sup>

### THEORY, METHOD AND PRAXIS

I should now want to focus on the long-standing question of the prevalence of non-legal, extra-marital mating patterns that have been the subject of so much attention in Caribbean family studies. The point at issue here is basically this: (1) How do we explain the ontological basis of the dominant mating form among black and "lower-class" West Indians?; (2) How do we account for the persistence of the patterns thus established? and (3) How do we relate contemporary mating practices to the incidence and rate of extra-marital births among the various sectors of these societies? To answer the first question, an ideographic approach is indispensable since we need to consider, among other things, the *legal proscriptions* relating to slave marriages, the role of the Church as an institution in plantation society, and the authority and attitudes of the planters towards slave unions. Legal impediments are well documented for most slave territories, and the issue should pose no problem for the researcher desirous of establishing the relationship between form of union permissible or not at a certain point in time, and the marital practices prevailing among segments thus affected.

The role of the Church in the development of Caribbean mating behaviour is an instructive example of the need to adopt more comprehensive methodological approaches in Caribbean family studies than is

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<sup>7</sup> Richard F. TOMASSON, "Pre-marital sexual permissiveness and illegitimacy in Nordic Countries", *Comp. Studies in Society & History* 18, 1976, pp. 252-270, provides an instructive case study of the distinction between illegitimate births and marital patterns.

generally done, and this may lead to greater care not to proffer facile explanations for this phenomenon. The dominance of a particular religious denomination in a territory had far-reaching implications for the marital behaviour of the subordinate population as witness the polar distinctions between Francophone Catholic slave regimes and the Anglophone Protestant territories.<sup>8</sup> In the French Antilles,

All religious practitioners except Catholics were forbidden to marry. Marriage itself was governed by the planters rather than the priests, who were forbidden to perform marriages involving slaves without the master's permission (Slater, 1977: 50).

Mariam Slater's observations derive directly from the examination of the provisions of The Code Noir of 1685 and early documentary sources relating to slave management. It is instructive to compare the influence of the Catholic Church in French territories with that of the Anglican Church in British slave plantations where it enjoyed the dominant status of being the "Established Church". Only practitioners and officials of the Established Church enjoyed the right of legal matrimony and since slaves were excluded from the church, they were also prohibited to marry by virtue of being "Real Estate and absolute property of their owners" in terms of various Acts, 1674-1688.<sup>9</sup> Two centuries later, the Under-Secretary of State was to observe that

It is difficult to perceive the policy of confining the right of celebrating marriages to the clergy of the Established Church, nor why other teachers of religion should be deprived of the salutary influence over the minds of the slaves which the enjoyment of this power should confer.<sup>10</sup>

Documents among the State Papers which I have examined make it patently clear that the Anglican Church enjoyed exclusive monopoly on matrimonial matters.<sup>11</sup> The following few excerpts demonstrate the point: '...I beg to observe that I am not of the Established Church, marriages

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<sup>8</sup> The literature on the role of the dominant religious institutions and their implication in the system of slavery is enormous. See for example, John F. MAXWELL, *Slavery and the Catholic Church*, London 1975 which provides a well annotated history of Catholic teaching concerning the moral legitimacy of the institution of slavery; CALDECOTT (1898); DELANY (1930); DEVAS (1932); BENNETT (1958).

<sup>9</sup> The relevant "Slave Acts" for the various slave territories are calendared in: *State Papers, Colonial Series: West Indies and the Americas, 1669-1688*, PRO, London.

<sup>10</sup> Under-Secretary of State W. Huskinsson to J. B. Skeete, President of Council of Barbados, October 8, 1827. *Parliamentary Papers 1828-1829*, Vol. 76, p. 55.

<sup>11</sup> *State Papers, CSP Col. Ser. 1669-1674; 1675-1676; Parliamentary Papers 1818-1823; 1823-1825; 1837-1841* relating variously to the "Treatment of slaves in the Colonies"; "Slave Population"; "Marriages of Slaves"; "Administration of Civil and Criminal Justice in the West Indies".

solemnized by me would not be legal'.<sup>12</sup> 'I have not considered myself authorized to solemnize marriages in a legal sense'.<sup>13</sup> 'As for slaves I should not consider myself justified in celebrating marriages between them without previous assurance from competent authority that such practice is conformable with the existing laws of the Colony'.<sup>14</sup>

There is ample documentary evidence from official contemporary records that the connivance between Church and State with respect to slave marriages went a long way to effectively discourage attempts to contract and form legal matrimony and family life. Even the unfettered clergy of the Established Church made very little effort to counter the long-standing planter intransigency against slave matrimony. Their collective negligence to take advantage of their monopoly in matrimonial affairs is attested to by the following observations made in response to metropolitan demands for records of slave marriages.

I beg to inform your excellency that during the space of thirty years I never knew or heard that marriages were ever performed by clergymen of the Church of England in this Island between slaves.<sup>15</sup>

Another Anglican clergyman similarly reported:

During forty-two years and nine months that I have been Rector and Incumbent of the Parish of St. George, I had never been called upon to marry any slaves.<sup>16</sup>

He goes on to make it clear that his was not an isolated case: 'No beneficed clergyman had ever married any slaves'. And further points out that in any case 'no marriage (is) lawful here unless solemnized by a minister of the Church of England'.<sup>17</sup>

One Anglican clergyman responding to official requests to furnish matrimonial information on the slaves in his Parish, provides clear evidence which supports the view that the connivance of secular and religious authorities in discouraging, if not prohibiting, slave matrimony may have been responsible for the development of a form of mating that has become the present sociological "problem":

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<sup>12</sup> Rev. Richard Elliot to Government Secretary R. Chapman, Demarara, December 13, 1821, p. 81. (Note: all references from # 12 to # 19 are extracted from *Parliamentary Papers relating to the Slave Population in the West Indies*, Vol. 1 Part II 1823. All pagination refers to this source.

<sup>13</sup> Evangelist John Davies to Secretary Chapman (p. 82).

<sup>14</sup> Rev. Archibald Browne to Secretary Chapman November 29, 1821 (p. 82).

<sup>15</sup> Rector George Collins (Antigua) to Governor Sir Benjamin D'Urban.

<sup>16</sup> Rector James Coull (Antigua) to Governor D'Urban, September 26, 1821.

<sup>17</sup> Coull to D'Urban (*ibid.*).

Your excellency will perceive that there is not any marriage of slaves in either Return; there is not a single instance of any such occurrence on record in either register, the circumstances having been invariably considered as illegal.<sup>18</sup>

An even more striking piece of further evidence revealing the dilemma faced by both the clergy and the "free black and coloured people" under the plantation regime is advanced by a non-Anglican clergyman who defiantly responded that because of his non-Anglican affiliation, 'marriages solemnized by me would not be legal; I have therefore refused to comply with requests of the *free black and coloured people*, and have not married any of them' (emphasis added).<sup>19</sup>

Archival materials on all West Indian slave colonies provide definitive evidence supporting the view that the paucity of slave marriages was not

TABLE 1

**Comparative Marriages of Slaves, and of Free Coloured Persons for Antigua, Barbados, Demarara, Montserrat, Tobago, Trinidad, 1808-1820**

TERRITORY	SLAVE	COLOURED
Antigua	nil <sup>a</sup>	122
Barbados	17	36
Demarara	159 <sup>b</sup>	59
Montserrat	nil	7
Tobago	nil	7
Trinidad	4	425

<sup>a</sup> In a report to Governor Sir Benjamin D'Urban, Rector George Collins affirms 'that during the space of thirty years I never knew or heard that marriages were ever performed by Clergymen of the Church of England in this Island between slaves. I have been Rector of the Parish of St. Philip about eighteen years, and have never been applied to, to officiate at the marriage of slaves.' (14 September 1821. *Parliamentary Papers: Slave Populations in the West Indies Vol. 1, 1823*, p. 50).

<sup>b</sup> The total is for the three years 1818-1820, there being no slave marriages prior to 1818. 'The Marriages of slaves is a thing unheard of in this colony, and I humbly conceive this holy institution to be altogether incompatible with the state of slavery under existing laws and regulations.' W. T. Austen to Sir Benjamin D'Urban, February 4, 1832. *Parliamentary Papers 1823*, p. 81.

<sup>18</sup> Rector Samuel W. Hartman (Antigua) to Governor D'Urban, September 1821 (p. 51).

<sup>19</sup> Rev. W. T. Austen (Demarara) to Secretary Chapman February 4, 1822 (p. 81).

due to any cultural propensity to promiscuity, but was a direct consequence of the intransigency of planter and Colonial interests. From about 1810 onward, considerable metropolitan pressure was being exerted on the legislatures and the clergy to furnish information (“Returns”) on the state of slave matrimony. The responses of local officials to the penetrating demands of successive Colonial Secretaries, Lord Bathurst and Lord Glenelg, clearly reveal that the principal cause for the dearth of matrimonial unions among both slaves and “Free Coloured Persons” was the implacable resistance of the planters to relinquish their absolute hold on their human “property”.

The slave masters averred that they had ‘no other objections to their [slaves’] marriage but what arises from the apprehension of losing their property’.<sup>20</sup> The burning issue then was the effect of legal marriage on the slave as property. The question which called for decision was

Whether the consent of an owner given to the marriage of his slave, could ... be construed by the law into a virtual emancipation of the slave?<sup>21</sup>

In all the English colonies, metropolitan legal opinion was at odds with legislative enactment of the local legislatures as well as judicial interpretation by local law officers. Attorneys-General supported the planters’ view that legal matrimony was incompatible with slave status whilst metropolitan opinion was that civil and “ecclesiastical law has always held without distinction ... that slaves were not to be excluded from marriage either with free persons or slaves...”<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> Rev. John Stephen to Governor Charles Cameron (Nassau), May 2, 1816 enclosed in Cameron to Lord Bathurst July 12, 1816. *Parliamentary Papers: Slavery and the West Indies 1818-1823*, p. 223.

<sup>21</sup> Stephen to Cameron July 8, 1816, *Parliamentary Papers 1818-1823*, p. 226. The issue of Slave marriages and their implications outlived legal emancipation right up to 1840. Barbados was the most recalcitrant as evident from a series of revised slave Bills rejected by the Colonial Office. Under-Secretary of State, W. Huskinson’s observations are illuminating: ‘On the subject of marriage, I regret to say that the provisions of this Act are very defective. The consent of the owner is an indispensable [*sic*] condition in every case, however capricious or unjust may be his refusal. It is necessary also that the slaves to be married should be both the property of the same person.’ Huskinson to J. B. Skeete, President of Council of Barbados, October 18, 1827, *Parliamentary Papers 1828-29*, Vol. 76, p. 55.

<sup>22</sup> Lord Bathurst to Governor Charles Cameron (Nassau) November 31 [*sic*] 1816, p. 227. Also see: Wm. Wylly (Attorney-General, Nassau) to Governor Cameron, January 26, 1814, p. 218, *Parliamentary Papers: Slavery and the West Indies 1818-1823. Correspondence: Marriage of Slaves* (pp. 217-227). A rather illuminating comment on the legalization of slave marriages was made by a Commissioner on a Tribunal to enquire into the “Administration of Justice in the West Indies: to the effect that, “It would be impolite to alter any law that may operate as an inducement to marriage”. *Parliamentary Papers: Justice in the West Indies*, Vol. 15, 1825, p. 45.

Colonial opinion, however, held the opposite view. It was felt that ‘no man will consent to the marriage of his slave, when he knows, or even apprehends, that he would thereby endanger his property.’<sup>23</sup> Consequently, in numerous instances local legal and political authorities successfully managed to subvert whatever legal principles and administrative instructions were feebly issued from London.

In Jamaica, the Reverend George Wilson Bridges, who was for long a staunch ecclesiastical supporter of the planters’ position against slave marriages and Christianization, attempted to placate metropolitan concerns regarding the condition of slaves by conducting (allegedly) mass marriages. In a letter dated June 14, 1823, to the Abolitionist William Wilberforce, he writes:

I have myself married one hundred and eighty-seven couples of negro slaves in my own parish, within the last two years, all of whom were encouraged by their owners to marry.<sup>24</sup>

When the London authorities insisted on detailed records, it turned out that all of the 187 marriages were purportedly solemnized in *one month*, February, 1823. (The actual number on record is 145.) Under pressure from Colonial Secretary Lord Bathurst, Bridges’ immediate successor, the Reverend Robert W. Dallas, submitted a lengthy but bland list of the alleged couples with the pointed comment: ‘It is impossible for me to state what fees the Rev. Mr. Bridges received on [sic] these marriages.’ And as to the form of marriage, ‘Rev. G. W. Bridges does not state.’<sup>25</sup>

By his own account, Rev. Bridges was all in favour of the planters’ position, and he expressed the same vehemence against slave emancipation as their owners. He particularly disliked the ‘free negro and coloured population whom he labelled as ‘that slothful race living without labour or means.’<sup>26</sup> Elsewhere he described the African slaves as ‘the extraordinary people, whose vices have stained [the pages of history] with so many crimes

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<sup>23</sup> Stephen to Cameron, *op. cit.*, p. 226.

<sup>24</sup> “A voice from Jamaica” in *Notices respecting Jamaica*, London, n.d. Gilbert Mathison, p. 22.

<sup>25</sup> Rev. Robert W. Dallas to Lord Bathurst, November 14, 1825, Enclosure # A. *Papers and Returns relating to the Slave Population in the West Indies: Parliamentary Papers 1826*, pp. 445-447. The Papers contain a detailed list of all the couples allegedly married by Bridges between August 12, 1821 and some unspecified date in 1824. Between December 28, 1824 and May 1, 1825, 48 slave marriages were reported as having been solemnized by Robert Dallas and John Trew respectively Rectors of the Parishes of Manchester and St. Thomas.

<sup>26</sup> *Notices respecting Jamaica*, p. 39.

and whose appearance has attracted the wonder of mankind.' He talks of 'the peculiar habits of so strange and barbarous a people,'<sup>27</sup> concluding that there is a uniformity in the character of all 'African tribes with which we are familiar in Jamaica: for the picture of one contains the outline of them all.'<sup>28</sup>

This sort of vitriolic sentiment was quite common among the plantocratic interests in the West Indies. Barbadian Historian John Poyer believed that the slaves were

an ignorant, superstitious, vindictive race, whom no moral obligations can bind to speak the truth (Poyer, 1808: 144).

One of the most consistent arguments that the planters and some clergymen employed to rationalize their objection to slave matrimony was the assumption that formal marriage would be meaningless to them given their presumed barbarity, savagery, stupidity, lustfulness and ignorance of God's grace.<sup>29</sup> Few local clergymen believed in the usefulness of their own religious institution's endeavours to Christianize the slave or to instil Christian morality into them because of their 'Lustful inclination,' or because they were too 'untractable & perverse.'<sup>30</sup> It is important to realize that it was not individual prejudices that stood in the way of regulated slave matrimony but the prevailing societal view of the slave's rightful place in the plantation economy. The crux of the problem was that Christian marriage of chattels was a contradiction in terms within the context of plantation slavery. It would have interfered with labour mobility through slave sales if members of a family could not be separated.

This issue became crystallized during the Amelioration period (1810-1827) in the protracted legislative tug-of-war between Colonial Secretary Lord Bathurst and the plantocratic West Indian legislators.

As regards the sale of Slaves in satisfaction of the debts of their owners, the Assembly ... found that it was surrounded with difficulties even greater than those apprehended by his Lordship...

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<sup>27</sup> George W. BRIDGES, in: *Annals of Jamaica*. London, 1827-28 Vol. II, John Murray, p. 398.

<sup>28</sup> *Annals of Jamaica*, p. 406.

<sup>29</sup> Bryan EDWARDS. *The History, Civil and Commercial of the British Colony in the West Indies*, Dublin, Luke White 1793, Vol. 2, p. 76.

<sup>30</sup> Various correspondence between Codrington Plantation officials, Barbados, and the Secretary of the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel (SPG), London, 1760-1775 cited in footnote 17 (Chapter VIII), J. H. BENNETT: *Bondsmen and Bishops: Slavery and Apprenticeship on the Codrington Plantations of Barbados 1710-1838*, Berkeley, 1958, p. 159.

The Assembly claimed to have implemented a law:

which enjoins the marshall, when selling Slaves under executions, to dispose of them in lots not exceeding five in number, unless there shall be more than five of one family, in which case he is required to sell the *whole family in one lot*. On this point the Assembly are not prepared ... to make further provision...<sup>31</sup>

Throughout the decade 1820-1830, the triple issue of Christianization, education and marriage of slaves was hotly debated between the local West Indian Legislatures and the metropolitan authorities. The obstructive tactics ranged from outright sabotage of ameliorative plans to subtle evasion of metropolitan instructions. As late as 1825 Barbadian planters were still paying lip-service to the demands for the education and religious instruction of slaves. In their farewell address to the Lord Bishop on his return to England, they affirmed their 'most sincere desire to afford the blessings of religious instruction to our Slaves'; and promised that they shall always be 'prompt and zealous in furthering every prudent measure which may seem conducive to this object.' However, they left no doubt what they meant by "prudent measure".

We cannot, without injustice to others, consent to such a subtraction of labour from the cultivation of the estates as would lead to a material reduction of income.<sup>32</sup>

The Barbadian planter/legislators were firmly determined to subvert the authority and wishes of the metropolitan government with regard to the amelioration of and alteration to the slave condition. As one exasperated judicial officer reported to Colonial Secretary Lord Glenelg:

The Solicitor-General is endeavouring to prove that a clause in one of the local Acts, which the Colonial Office has sanctioned, will enable them to effect this, but in case this method should fail, they intend to pass another Act.<sup>33</sup>

The subversive practice alluded to in the above-mentioned report was a long-standing tactic of the planter/legislators in the Caribbean colonies. The Barbadian slave owners were unquestionably the most intransigent and

<sup>31</sup> Robert Haynes, Speaker, Barbados House of Assembly to Sir Henry Warde, Governor, October 23, 1826, *Parliamentary Papers 1827*, p. 273. London. Lord Bathurst continued to express his displeasure that documents relating to ameliorative Acts passed by the Legislature of Barbados since May 1823 contained no 'provision for promoting the religious instruction of the Slaves, or the better observance of the Sabbath, respecting the marriage of the Slaves; [or]... for preventing the separation of Slaves from their relations.' *His Majesty's Papers 1826*, London, p. 14.

<sup>32</sup> Statement signed by 85 Proprietors of Estates in the Island of Barbados in: *Parliamentary Papers 1826-27*, Vol. 71. London, p. 1.

<sup>33</sup> Magistrate Buxton to Under-Secretary, Sir George Grey. 29th March 1837. *Parliamentary Papers 1837-38*, Vol. 85, p. 3. Enclosed in Glenelg to McGregor 1/5/1837.



obstreperous legislators. Throughout the slavery period and even after emancipation they poured out voluminous and cantankerous enactments designed to ensure their unyielding grasp over the slaves. They continually defied metropolitan orders on the grounds that they

felt it a sacred duty which they owed to their country, their constituents, and themselves, [and] whilst anxiously disposed to meet the views and wishes of His Majesty's government, not to lose sight of "the safety of the inhabitants, the interest of their property, and the welfare of the Slave themselves" ... the Assembly ... found that they could not yield to his Lordship's recommendations...

Compulsory manumission is such a direct invasion of the right of property hitherto secured by repeated Acts of the colonial legislature ... that the Assembly felt they could not ... contemplate a measure so absolutely destructive of that right...<sup>34</sup>

It is patently clear from the archival record that the central issue in the legislative tug-of-war between the West Indian slave regimes and their home government was the question of the civil status of the slave. This included the right to matrimony which the planters always construed as an erosion of their proprietary rights. Christianization and education of the slave were cognate issues but did not entail the dreaded ramifications implied by marriage as disruptive of gang-labour organization so essential to the plantation enterprise. A closer examination of legislative enactments governing slave communities may provide more probable sociological explanations for the mating patterns that constitute the majority of contemporary unions among segments of Caribbean societies than current theorizing postulates.

Slave regimes were highly organized socio-economic enterprises underpinned by a plethora of legal and ecclesiastical precepts designed for 'the governing of Negroes' (Act # 82/1688), or for 'the better Ordering and government of Slaves' (Act # 82/1826), or to 'secure the peaceable possession of Negroes and other Slaves' (Act # 61/1709), the latter being derived from an earlier law declaring 'Slaves to be "Real Estate" and absolute property of their owners' (Act 29/1/1674). The dilemma of the slave regimes was that the slaves as property were also human, hence special laws had to be enacted to deal with them. But the planters' rationale was that

Negroes and other Slaves ... are of barbarous, wild, and savage nature, and such renders them wholly unqualified to be governed by the laws, customs, and practices of our nation, it therefore becomes absolutely necessary that such other constitutions, laws

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<sup>34</sup> Haynes to Warde, October 23, 1826. *Parliamentary Papers 1827*, pp. 271-72.

and orders should be ... framed and enacted for the good regulating or ordering of them, as may both restrain the disorders, rapines, and inhumanities to which they are naturally prone and inclined...<sup>35</sup>

Ecclesiastical pronouncements were equally clear about the Church's view of the slave's position in the plantation system. In a Memorandum of 28th August, 1680, the Lord Bishop of London clearly advised the Council of Trade and Plantations that the 'Apprehension of planters that conversion

TABLE 2

**Marriages of Slaves, Free Coloured Persons and White Persons in 10 of 11 Parishes of Barbados, 1825-1830**

PARISH	SLAVE	COLOURED	WHITE
Christ Church	4	6	55
St. Michael	4	72	189
St. James	3	nil	25
St. John	12	no record	no record
St. Lucy	nil	nil	31
St. Thomas	1	2	28
St. George	5	2	69
St. Joseph	nil	nil	40
St. Andrew	nil	4	45
St. Philip	2	6	52
St. Peter		no records available	

**Source:** Compiled from Parochial Registers of Marriages 1827-1848 and collated with data from Returns relating to the Slave Population, Barbados. *Parliamentary Papers: Extinction of Slavery, 1832*, pp. 24-30. (Barbados Department of Archives).

<sup>35</sup> Preamble to "An Act for the Governing of Negroes," No. 82, August 8th, 1688, re-affirmed by Bill No. 1, 23rd October, 1826. *Parliamentary Papers 1827*, p. 231.

of slaves may deprive the owners of their present power and disposal of them, [were] to be dispelled as groundless.<sup>36</sup>

More than a century later another Lord Bishop of London was still assuring the apprehensive West Indian planters that

The Gospel enjoins everyone to be content with the state of life to which it has pleased God to call him. ... It enjoins servants of all kinds, and Slaves among the rest to be obedient to their masters, and to please them well in all things; ... [Negroes were to be] carefully instructed in these duties, and ... taught to perform them under pain of God's displeasure and future punishment.<sup>37</sup>

Here again, the Lord Bishop endeavoured to dispel any idea that would link Christian conversion with freedom from servitude.

It should be recollected also, that in the plan here proposed, there is no intention of teaching Negro children to *write* but only to *read*; which ... will always preserve a proper distinction and subordination between them and their superiors, and present an insurmountable barrier against their approaching anything like an equality with their masters.<sup>38</sup>

Some thirty years later, in September, 1838, another high Anglican Church official, the Archdeacon of Barbados, saw fit to exhort the newly emancipated blacks that it was 'decidedly your Christian duty' to continue 'to be honest and faithful labourers'<sup>39</sup> upon the estates. It is thus not surprising to find one Parish Magistrate reporting in 1841 that 'The labourers continue fully as much so as when in a state of slavery.'<sup>40</sup> By then the condition of slavery had been so fully internalized as to make subordination a "natural" state. By the beginning of the 19th century Beilby Porteus, then Lord Bishop of London, had concluded that the planters had 'obtained the most absolute dominion [over] both body and soul' of the slave.<sup>41</sup> Thus the Church quietly acquiesced to the prevailing planters' view that the

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<sup>36</sup> Bishop of London to Council of Trade and Plantations August 28th, 1680. *Calendar of State Papers, Colonies, 1677-1680*. No. 1488.

<sup>37</sup> Beilby Porteus, "A Letter to the Clergy of the West India Islands," 2nd April, 1788 (15 pp. printed). Rhodes House Library, Oxford University, p. 6.

<sup>38</sup> Beilby Porteus, "Letter to the Governors, Legislatures, and Proprietors of Plantations in the British West India Islands," January 1, 1808, pp. 21-22 (italics original), 25 pp. printed, Rhodes House Library, Oxford University.

<sup>39</sup> "Address of the Archdeacon to the Labouring Population." (Extracted from 'The Barbadian,' 8th September, 1838). *Papers relative to the West Indies: Condition of the labouring population 1839*. Part II, p. 73.

<sup>40</sup> Special Magistrate A. H. Morris to John Evans McGregor, December 31, 1841, reporting on Parish of St. Lucy, Barbados. *Report on the West India Colonies 1843*, London, p. 756.

<sup>41</sup> Beilby Porteus: (Letter II) 1808, *op. cit.*, p. 25.

Christianization and education of the blacks was tantamount to 'putting arms into their Slaves hands, against themselves [the owners], & making them [the slaves] more Capable of Carrying on Plots & Contrivances against the Common Safety.'<sup>42</sup>

TABLE 3

**Number of Baptisms and Marriages between Slaves and between Free Coloured Persons from 1808 to 1820 in 11 Parishes of Barbados**

PARISH	BAPTISMS		MARRIAGES	
	Slave	Coloured	Slaves	Coloured
Christ Church	no record	no record	2	nil
St. Michael	2,656	1,419	1	36
St. James	118 <sup>a</sup>	11 <sup>b</sup>	3	nil
St. Peter	84	147	nil	nil
St. Lucy	9	69	nil <sup>c</sup>	nil <sup>d</sup>
St. Thomas	379	21	nil	nil
St. George	254	74	1	nil
St. Joseph	42	84	nil	nil
St. Andrew	111	76	nil	nil
St. John	441	61	nil	nil
St. Philip	225	104	10	nil

<sup>a</sup> Includes 32 adults and 85 infants plus 1 unaccounted for – Margin comment in original record.

<sup>b</sup> Includes 1 adult and 10 infants – Margin comment in original record.

<sup>c, d</sup> "No Marriage has been legally solemnized, either between Slaves, or between Free Black or Coloured Persons, from the 1st of Jan. 1808." — Margin comment in original record.

**Source:** Compiled from various Returns, Barbados. *Parliamentary Papers Relating to the Slave Population in the West Indies*, Vol. 1, 1823, pp. 37-45.

<sup>42</sup> William Johnson to Secretary SPG, Barbados, January 14, 1737, A-Mss. XXVI, pp. 385-89.

Archival records of marriages between slaves as well as between the Free Coloured Persons from the year 1808 to 1820 provide ample evidence of the successful suppression of slave matrimony by anti-marriage proscriptions. In all the 11 Parishes of Barbados, only 17 marriages between slaves are recorded for the entire period, and only 36 between Free Coloured Persons.

In the other West Indian plantation colonies the record is equally dismal. Marriage Registers are silent on the question of slave marriages, and virtually all "Returns" for these territories contain, under the relevant headings, the ominous comment: 'There is no record of marriages among slaves from the earliest period.' For all slave colonies from Antigua to Demarara the enabling Acts for slave marriages date only from the mid-1820s. In the Bahamas the *Slave Consolidation Act*, 28 January, 1824, conferred for the first time the legal sanction of marriage between slaves, and between Free Coloured Persons.<sup>43</sup> It enjoins the clergy to give religious instruction and baptism to slaves. Furthermore, 'Clergymen may solemnize marriages between slaves and slaves, and slaves and free people without publication of banns or license, if they profess the Christian religion and produce written consent of their owners.' It also confers legitimacy upon 'the issue of such marriages.' It should be noted that fetters still exist in so far as the 'written consent of their owners' is a requirement for the exercise of this right.

The most interesting piece of matrimonial legislation is that passed on the island of St. Vincent. *The Consolidated Act*, 16 December, 1825 provided for the Christianization of the Slaves and for 'intermarriage by the Established Church of England, by consent of the owner or deputy, conditional upon a proper and adequate knowledge of the nature and obligation of the marriage vow.' However, the protection of the slave owner was still paramount; 'such marriage shall not confer on the parties or their issue any rights inconsistent with the duties which Slaves owe to their owners.' The slave marriage should not be construed as a means 'which might destroy the rights or injure the property of their owners.'<sup>44</sup> Furthermore, the wily planter/legislators ensured that the grudging concession to Christianization did not mean religious freedom for the bondsmen:

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<sup>43</sup> *Parliamentary Papers: Slave Colonies Legislative Acts 1826*, London (Clauses 10, 13).

<sup>44</sup> *Parliamentary Papers, Slave Colonies Legislative Acts 1826*, London, p. 80 (Clauses 8, 10).

Any Slave or Slaves found publicly preaching or teaching any religious subject, shall upon due proof thereof be punished in such manner as any two justices may deem proper by whipping and imprisonment.<sup>45</sup>

In St. Lucia the enabling legislation was also hedged in by all sorts of cautious provisos. The 1825 law dealing with "Social Rights" contained a clause on "The Rights of Marriages."<sup>46</sup> It stipulated that

Marriages among Slaves shall be subject to the same law as marriages among free persons ... with the following exceptions: A marriage among Slaves may be celebrated by any Christian minister, or by any public teacher of religion approved by the government, and engaged in no other secular calling than that of a schoolmaster.

The Act, while appearing to give unfettered matrimonial rights to the slaves, in fact entrenched the proprietary and paternal rights of the slave owner:

The consent of the father and mother of the Slave is dispensed with. The owner, his attorney, guardian or other representative, shall give his consent to the marriage in writing.<sup>47</sup>

## CONCLUSION

Given such overwhelming evidence on the causal conditions that led to the manifestation of contemporary mating patterns, it is difficult to understand the persistence of most researchers to posit explanations on presumed cultural, racial, economic and social bases or on some nebulous "normative value system" peculiar to the black segment of these societies. I suggest that it is quite possible to break down the trait complex of mating patterns into separate analytical categories (mating, family, birth), and to consider them ideographically in their temporal and spatial dimensions, and finally to seek for relevant explanations of the particular sociological problem in its context. The first principle is to discover causal factors, then to establish relationships, and ultimately attempt to explain the persistence of the phenomena under investigation. This does not appear to be currently the case in Caribbean research of mating patterns.

The major task facing socio-anthropological research in Caribbean mating patterns is to find satisfactory explanations for the persistence of

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<sup>45</sup> *Parliamentary Papers 1826 (op. cit.)*, p. 91 (Clauses 56).

<sup>46</sup> "Slave Law for St. Lucia, Book II, Chapter 1; Social Rights Part First: The Rights of Marriages". *Parliamentary Papers 1826*. London.

<sup>47</sup> *Op. cit.* Clause 1, p. 67.

mating behaviours that are undoubtedly linked to a previous phase in a history marked by peculiar socio-structural, economic, ecological, demographic, and ethical conditions and racial attitudes. It is one thing to posit how a particular phenomenon originated, and quite another to demonstrate why its acquired characteristics persist even under radically different conditions. It would appear that this is the crux of the sociological problem in contemporary Caribbean ethnology.

More than twenty years ago William Goode drew attention to the primacy of societal norms in the definition of individual behaviour and value conformity. Goode argued that high illegitimacy rates cannot be "survivals of native customs" for:

It is the *community*, not the individual or the family, that maintains conformity to or deviation from the norm of legitimacy. The community defines legitimacy. The individual decision ... determines whether illegitimacy will be risked, ...but there is little stigma if the community itself gives almost as much respect for conformity as for non-conformity. ...Individual conformity to a given norm ... is dependent on *both* the commitment of the community to the cultural norm and the strength of its *social* controls (Goode, 1961: 917-918, emphasis original).

It is thus clear that a sociologically valid theoretical and methodological approach to research on Caribbean mating patterns is to place them squarely in the societal context in which they developed as demonstrated by the evidence of the archival record. Explanations of their persistence in contemporary Caribbean societies, similarly, have to be sought in the socially conditioned behaviours shared by the whole society with regards to mating practices including white Creole concubinage.

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