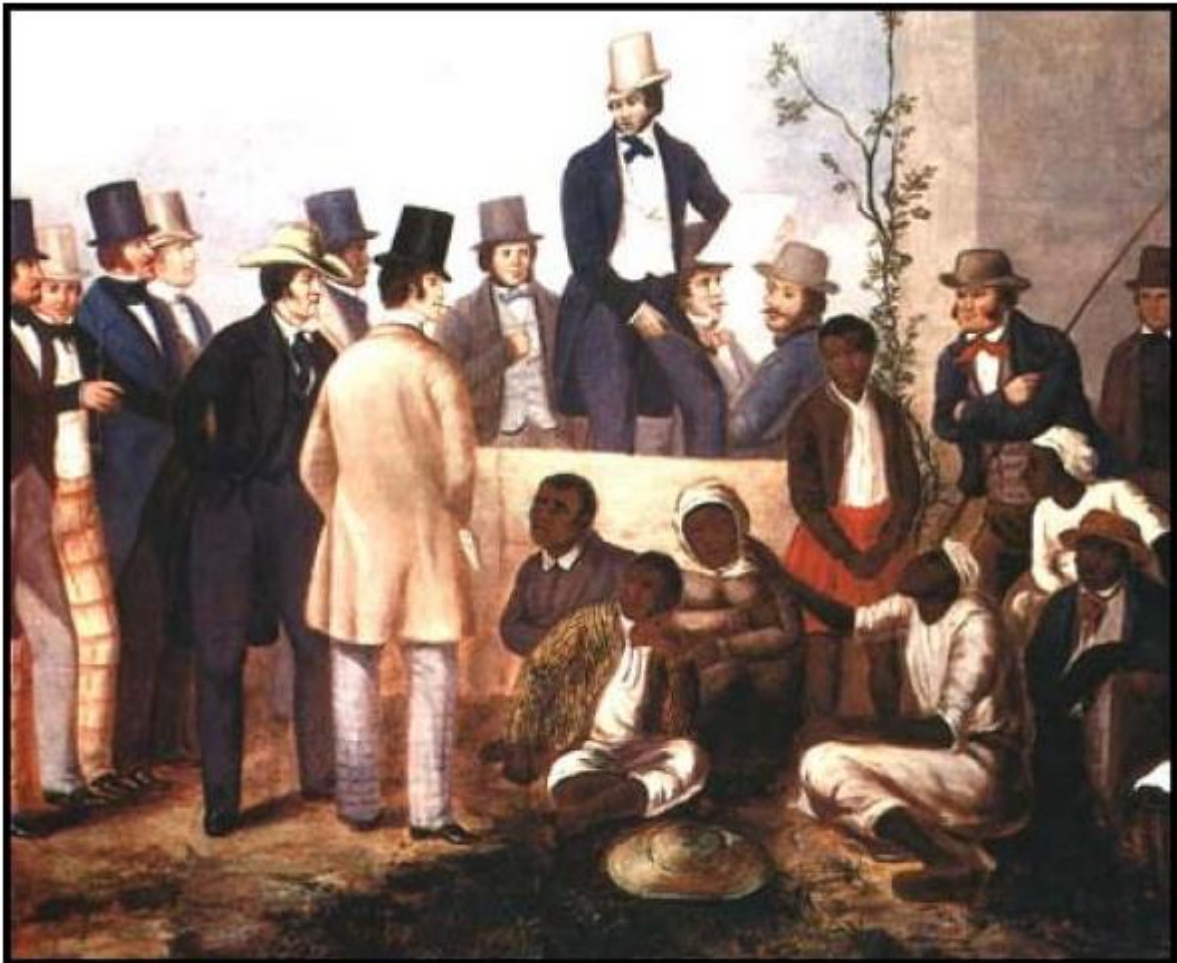


Why did Antigua and Bermuda choose not to adopt the Apprenticeship System?

Introduction:

Instead, they gave full freedom to all of their enslaved population. This proved to be a wise move because the system was so difficult to implement that it was full of problems and led to all sorts of confusion. Finally, it had to be aborted.

Firstly the planters did not change their spiteful and greedy attitude over night. They argued and quarreled about the half free state of the apprentices. They would have preferred if they had remained slaves during the apprenticeship period. They did not agree with the fact that stipendiary magistrates were to dispense justice between them and the apprentices. Yet they welcomed the forty and a half hours of unpaid labor. They felt this was more than due to them. They saw as a glorious opportunity to squeeze the last ounce of labor out of the poor apprentices. They exploited the vagueness of the clauses to their own advantage.



Planters at a slave auction

(a) There was much argument, confusion and tension over the working week. The apprentices wanted to divide the forty and a half compulsory labor into four days of nine hours and one day of four hours. That would mean that they would work from Monday to Thursday for nine hours each day. They would only have to work four hours on Friday. They would be finished working by half day. They could either work for wages for their masters or on their provision ground and sell in the market on Saturday.

The planters on the other hand insisted on an eight hour day. That would mean that the apprentices would work from Monday to Friday for eight hours each day and come back on Saturday to work for half an hour!

(b) The planters knew that the apprentices had no concept of time save sunrise and sunset. They planned to cheat them and make them work overtime without pay whether they worked the eight hour or nine hour work day.

(c) Planters hired the apprentices to work outside the forty and a half hours and refuse to pay them or pay them less than they owed them. The poor apprentices could not calculate exactly how much they were being cheated but they knew that they were being cheated.

(d) The Act did not specify whether the apprentice had a right to the provision grounds that they had during slavery. Some spiteful planters charged the apprentices high rent for the use of not just the provision ground but also the hut!

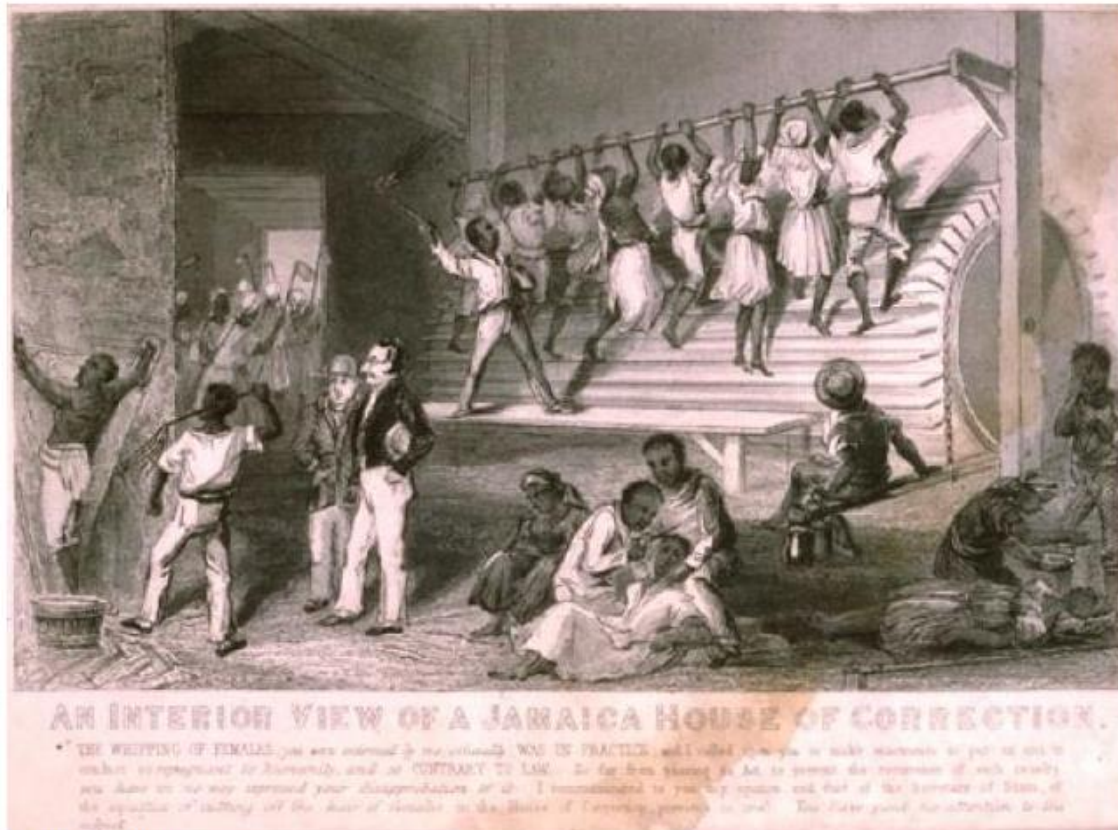


Inside a replica slave hut

(e) Mothers were forced to pay rent per head for each of her children under six years of age since they were now totally free and no longer the responsibility of the planter.

(f) The Stipendiary magistrates could not visit each of the estates often enough to hear the complaints. To begin with they were old and retired soldiers. They had to travel on horseback over hills and valleys from estate to estate. Many of the injustices were never reported and the planters were never charged or fined.

(g) The Jamaican planters invented the treadmill as a means of punishment for apprentices. This was worse than the floggings of slave



The Treadmill

(h) In Barbados female apprentices who were sent to jail for offences committed had their hair shaved.

(i) Planters demoted non-field workers to field workers so that they could get the extra years of free labor out of them.

(j) Many planters chose not to believe the apprentice when they complained of illnesses. In addition they did not provide adequate medical attention because the law was not very clear on that issue. It was ambiguous.

(k) In Jamaica, a mistress charged her apprentice with insolence because she was singing while during her duties and refused to stop when she asked her to. The apprentice was found guilty and was given four days of solitary confinement!

(l) Another woman was one hour late for work. Although she explained that she had a two month old baby and two other toddlers to look after she was given fifteen minutes on the treadmill. When she came back to the estate she still had to work the fifteen minutes plus the time it took her to get to town, complete the punishment and travel back to the estate.

(m) Some spiteful planters and overseers refused to give the apprentices time to go to the bush to perform their body functions. Those who did wanted the apprentices to work back the little time they took to use the bush! Others told the apprentices to do 'their thing' right there in the presence of everyone!

(n) The apprentices were given all sorts of degrading tasks to perform. They were expected to do things that they had not done even when they were enslaved and thought of as property. For example, on the Cane Grove estate in St. Vincent the apprentices were ordered to carry wet manure in baskets on their heads.

All these experiences and more made the apprentices very unhappy and angry with the system.

Emancipation

Finally, after much protest by Missionaries, humanitarians and abolitionists, England decided to end the Apprenticeship for ALL apprentices on August 1, 1838.



Liberation from slavery