

Social Relations on a Typical 18th Century Sugar Estate



Slave quarters

It is fair to argue that there was limited social contact between the slaves and their masters. This was to preserve the distance between them as well as the notion of superiority of the whites and inferiority of the blacks. But there would be some instances when they were forced to relate to each other.

In what instances and circumstances would they be forced to relate to each other?

Planters, overseers and white employees came into contact when issuing orders, in their supervisory capacity and when carrying out punishments.

Planters and Domestic slaves:

Domestic slaves had the most day to day contact or relations with the whites. They had many personal tasks to perform that brought them into contact with each other, for example serving meals, assisting with baths and so on.

Overseer and field/artisan slaves

He was the one with the constant day to day relating at roll call, supervising the issue of rations be it food or clothing (osnaburg) and so on. He was expected to stand by or sit astride his horse constantly supervising the planting and reaping of the cane as well as the conversion of the juice to sugar.

He was usually the person to whom the slaves reported their 'illnesses'. He had to determine if the slaves' illness warranted being sent from the fields to the 'hospital'. At times he had to dispense medicines!

He also had sexual relations with the female slaves. They were also the ones who prepared his meals, washed his clothes and saw to all his other social needs.

The masters and the field slaves

The whites came into contact with the field slaves chiefly at holiday time. For example the planter sometimes sat on their verandah and watched the slave parade at Christmas time. He would laugh and call to them. Some slaves were often invited to perform acts of amusements at parties, especially the sambo or quashie characters.

Sexual contact:

The planters conveniently thought of their slaves as property and as such felt that they had the unquestionable right to do what they wanted with them. To make matters worst they lived in a society that 'turned a blind eye' to the sexual relations with and ill treatment of the slaves.

White women vs Slave women

There was much resentment between the white women and the enslaved woman therefore who was 'involved' with the white man. As a result, relations between were hostile. The white woman would try to hurt or maim the enslaved. She would often complain that tasks done by her were not done well hoping to get the planter to demote her to the fields. If that didn't work she would give her the most demeaning and degrading jobs to perform.

Some white or coloured women in the towns who kept taverns and brothels owned one or two female slaves. The patrons and clients of these business places were sailors, military officers and so on.



Slave women