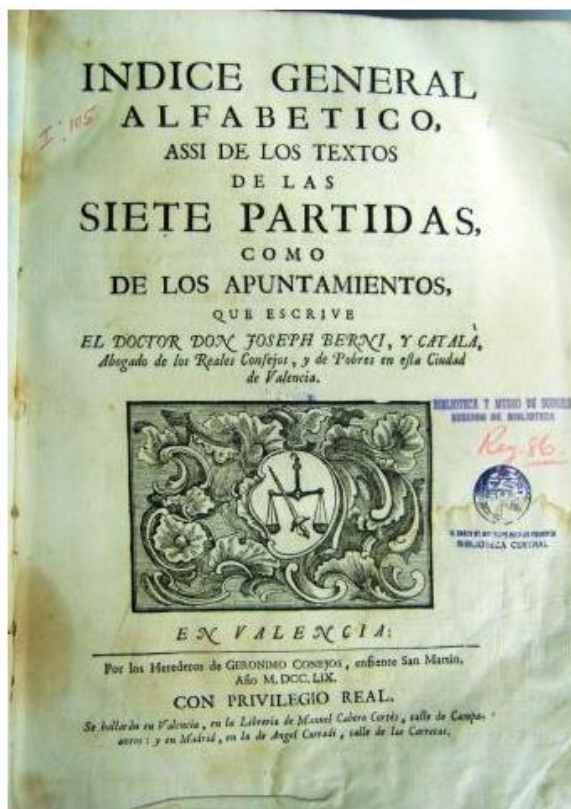


# Slave Control

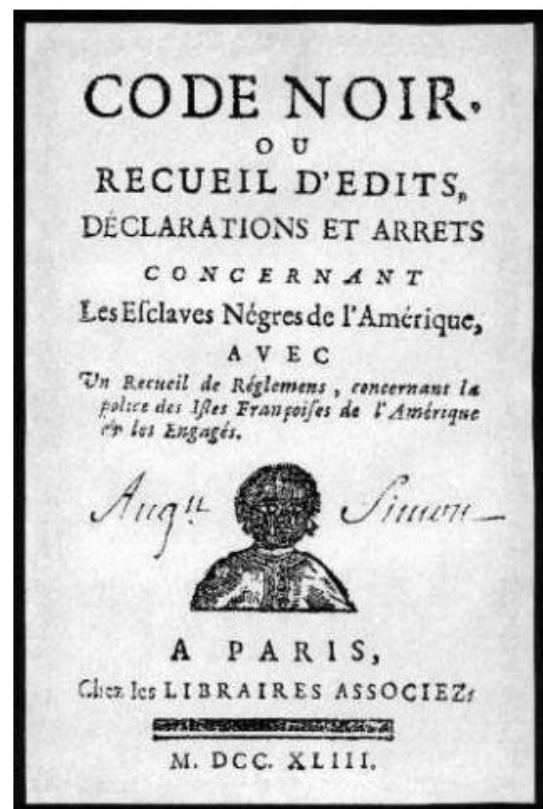
## Introduction:

Slavery was a legal institution. All the colonies passed laws to control their slaves.

The Spanish instituted the **Siete Partidas**, the French had the **Code Noir** but the English Government left it to the individual Assemblies to enact their own laws as they thought best.



*Siete Partidas*



*Code Noir*

**You may imagine that at the same time it seemed like a marvelous idea. Why?**

It saved England the 'trouble' and time of writing these laws that might not even be fit for the colonies. In the same vein, she felt it best that the planters through their representatives in the House of Assembly construct these laws since they lived in the colonies. The truth was that at the time she was more concerned or shall we say engrossed in the increase in the revenues that she received from the 'jewels in her Crown'.

The British Caribbean had strong Assemblies with a lot of power invested in them from England. Most if not all the members of the Lower House were sugar

planters. They all had the same attitude towards their slaves and basically agreed on how these slaves should be treated.

**France chose to draw up a** slave code because, unlike the English, the French colonies never had a plantocracy which was fully in control as it was in the British colonies. Until 1785 there were no French Local Assemblies. Therefore, all laws and policies were decided in France and carried out by the Governor or the Intendant and the many officials on the islands. Slaves worked on coffee as well

The British viewed their slaves as chattel property and as such, they could be sold, transferred to another estate or used to pay debts. Slave marriage and manumission therefore, were not encouraged. The Spanish, on the other hand, considered the slaves to be human beings-albeit lesser human beings! They acknowledge that slavery was wrong, but argued that it was a necessary evil.

The Spanish felt that they had a Christian duty towards the slaves. This was reflected in the slave laws themselves and account for the main differences between the Spanish slave laws (**Siete Partidas**) and the British Slave Laws. For example, Spanish slaves had rights-they could not be starved, overworked or unlawfully punished. The law guaranteed them right of entry to the Roman Catholic Church as well as time for religious instructions. They could also marry without their owners' permission and were allowed to have a family. One must note however that many of these laws were just on paper.

Both the British and the French planters tried to control the economic life of their slaves in terms of property, time and earnings.

- Slaves who stole animals would be put to death.
- Slaves could not legally possess property or legally make contracts.
- Slaves could not be paid for any work that they did.
- As personal property slaves could be sold in debt or left on the will for someone to inherit.
- Slaves could not own land, they were allowed a small plot to plant ground provisions on so as to save the planter money that would have been used to import food.

## Psychological/Ideological Control

The whites argued that the Africans were barbaric and uncivilized heathens. They were doing them a favour by exposing them to European civilization and Christianity. Most of the psychological control surrounded the slaves' race and colour which was seen as inferior to the whites.

The planters tried to crush the slaves' spirit, but this was not always easy. The **Ashanti** and **Mandingo** slaves, for example, were known to be fierce and resistant



*A fight with the Ashanti*

They were stripped of their identity, especially the African born slaves who were forced to take the name given to them by their owner. They were stripped of their dignity- made to feel less than a human.

Men were not allowed to have any ego. When placed in leadership positions it was of such that the slaves that they were in charge of hated them and saw them as traitors, for example: Slave Drivers.

## Social Control

**How did the planters control the slaves in the areas of food, clothing, housing and dress?**

They dictated what they should eat and when they should eat. Although they built their own huts, they were directed to build one room, one window, one door, and huts with dirt floor- signifying and emphasizing their inferiority.

Slaves were not allowed to be educated. Ignorance was a powerful means of control.

Their dress was inferior, of poor quality, lacking in style and of course inadequate. It is said that children went naked until about age six. The adults were given two suits of clothing per year. The domestic slaves were often given hand-me-down clothing which they were expected to relish.

### **Physical Control**

The slaves' every movement was watched by the owners. The overseers, drivers and watchmen had a vital role to play in this form of control.

Punishment was the biggest form of control. The whip was a stimulus to labour and a constant form of punishment. For fear of the hundreds of lashes the slaves 'kept in line' and did basically as they were told. The slaves could not move off the estate without a pass. They worked for fourteen hours a day under strict and constant supervision.

### **Cultural Control**

The slaves were not allowed to practice their own religion. Instead, they were forced to acknowledge their owner's religion. They were only allowed to sit at the back of the Anglican/Catholic Churches. Certain aspects of their culture such as their music and dance were seen as vulgar, lewd and uncivilized behaviour. The planters openly scoffed at them. Other aspects such as drumming were banned on penalty of severe punishment, even death. The planters in colonies with Maroons settlements in particular would have either known or heard of the effectiveness of the abeng and drums as instruments of communication in a revolt.

Despite all of these various methods of control, the slaves resisted the system of slavery. The period of slavery in the Indies is punctuated with acts of resistance as well as bloody violent revolts.