

## INTRODUCTION

In the late 1770s and early 1780s, Kingston went through one of its periodic shifts in merchant leadership. Several of its leading merchants, including the wealthiest and most important figure in Kingston's commercial community, Thomas Hibbert, died, allowing for new entrants into its lucrative mercantile businesses, including, most importantly, the buying, selling and dispersing of African slaves brought to Kingston from West Africa and then transferred to the plantations and pens of the Jamaican countryside.

Unfortunately, Hibbert, who died in 1780, did not leave records indicating how much money he had accumulated in his long career as Kingston's most successful importer of slaves (he first came to Kingston in 1734 and was the dominant merchant figure in the town, replacing Edward Manning who died in 1756, by the late 1750s). But the estates of several other merchant figures that died around the same time as did Hibbert give us some idea of how rich he was. Between 1777 and 1783, all three principals of the large Kingston slave trading firm, Delpratt, Foord and Clarke (Samuel Delpratt and Edward Foord were the Kingston partners; Richard Clarke was the junior partner, residing at Montego Bay) died. Each left an inventory. Their wealth was substantial. Foord was the richest, with a personal estate valued at £206,211 Jamaica currency (or £147,294 sterling). Delpratt left £198,702 and Clarke died with personal assets of £67,678. Between them they had non-landed assets of £472,591. Although they owned 192 slaves between them, the great majority of their estates – 83.5 percent- were in the form of debts. I will provide an analysis of their debt portfolio later on. They were owed £394,574 (£281,839 sterling), if we sum

debts in the three inventories. In the inventory of the partner who died last – Samuel Delpratt – the debt lent out by Delpratt on his own, by Delpratt, Foord and Clark; and by Delpratt and Foord amounted to £373,025.62.

Other wealthy merchants involved in the slave trade died at around this time. John Morse, a Kingston merchant and leading attorney with the supervision of nine sugar estates in the 1750s, had moved to London as the co-partner of Zachary Bayly (who himself had died in 1769, with a personal estate in Jamaica valued at £160,640) before setting up business as a commission agent, receiving sugar consignments from Jamaica, in the firm Morse and Smith. At his death in 1782, he left £138,575 in personal property in Jamaica, of which £100,768 was in the form of debts, being his half share of £200,232 owed by 26 planters to Morse and Smith. Malcolm Laing, a Kingston merchant, died the same year, worth £88,600, with debts amounting to £81,452. Scudamore Winde, a merchant in neighbouring St. Catherine, had died a few years earlier, in 1776, with personal assets of £94,273, of which £82,233 were in the form of debts. Across the island, Sir Simon Clarke, a baronet whose noble father had been transported to Jamaica when convicted of being a highwayman in 1722, also died in this period. His west Jamaican estate was the largest inventoried in Jamaica before 1784, amounting to a massive £269,592, of which £244,660 was in the form of debts – bonds, mortgages, protested bills of exchange and notes, detailed as a loan portfolio below.

If we added together all the personal wealth of these merchants and money lenders (Clarke and Morse were also heavily involved in planting, owning 171 and 490 slaves respectively), the sums involved are £1,063,631, of which £903,687 was in the form of debts. It is unimaginable that Thomas Hibbert's estate would have been smaller than any of these men so if we assigned him a nominal personal estate of

£350,000 with £250,000 in the form of debts owed to him, then we arrive at £1,413,361 TEV and £1,153,687 debts owed to 4 merchants and a merchant house. That amounts to £824,062 sterling. To put this in perspective, it is probably the equivalent to around £500,000,000 or £1 billion in today's money or equivalent in the eighteenth century to the total wealth of several dukes or two or three of the wealthiest London merchants. A more appropriate sense of value might be that the total credit extended by these seven men in the late 1770s and early 1780s would have purchased 30,392 enslaved persons, using the average value of slaves in Jamaican inventories between 1776 and 1784. To put it another way, these major merchants lent out sufficient money to buy 15.8 percent of slaves living in Jamaica in 1774.

This paper is a very preliminary attempt to try and make some sense of the debts held by men such as Thomas Hibbert, Edward Foord, Samuel Delpratt and Sir Simon Clarke. I make no claims for any depth or subtlety in my investigations: most of this paper consists of the presentation of raw data about wealth and debt in Jamaica during the period of the slave trade that was held in local hands. It is derived from an analysis of 9,347 inventories taken for deceased Jamaicans between 1674 and 1785, of which 2,351, 2,310 of which date from after 1710, are of Kingston residents and which form the core of my investigations. Contrary to what is advertised in my title, I will not make an in-depth analysis of credit and debt in the slave trade per se. Others have analysed this better than I can do, notably Jacob Price in a pioneering essay and Kenneth Morgan in a series of brilliant articles and books.<sup>1</sup> My paper really wants to make a very simple point. I suggest that the amount of money lent out by residents of Jamaica was more considerable than has been realised and that Kingston merchants played a very significant role in providing credit to planters for the acquisition of

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<sup>1</sup> Jacob Price; Kenneth Morgan

slaves, livestock, land and mill equipment as well as providing means for planters and other Jamaicans to engage in conspicuous consumption and to fund family inheritances. The activities of these merchants need to be set alongside the better known activities of British merchants engaged in long-distance overseas trade. I also want to suggest that we can learn a good deal from the reconstruction of loan portfolios from listings of debts in inventories about the flow of credit and debt in Jamaica. Finally, I want to argue that an analysis of the amount of debt held by Jamaicans done over time helps to explain a significant increase in commercial activity in Jamaica after the end of the War of the Austrian Succession.

#### THE ADAM SMITH PROBLEM

The question of credit and debt in colonial British America is a curious one. On the one hand, everyone recognises that ascertaining how much credit was available to Americans and West Indians before the end of the eighteenth century is a vitally important topic. As a Liverpool slave trader put it, the right sort of credit “made the wheel turn.”<sup>2</sup> In developing economies, credit was necessary for economic growth. It was necessary to acquire land and slaves, to improve plantations, to buy trading vessels, to begin a mercantile operation, to build houses, to improve standards of living, and to provide for future generations. On the other hand, detailed information about debt and credit is very hard to come by. Although “credit was the very life blood of the colonies,” “money lending in colonial America has not received the attention it deserves.”<sup>3</sup> We tend to rely very much on qualitative rather than quantitative evidence about debt and its meanings, in part because statements about colonial indebtedness are abundant and easy to access while quantitative evidence,

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<sup>2</sup> Cited in Price, “Credit in the slave plantation economies,” 339.

<sup>3</sup> Davies, “Origins of the Commission System,” 92; Julian Gwyn, “Money Lending in New England: The Case of Admiral Sir Peter Warren and His Heirs, 1739-1805,” *New England Quarterly*, 44 (1991), 117.

while also abundant, is notoriously hard to interpret and time-consuming to assemble. Thus, in studies of the Chesapeake historians have placed great importance upon statements made by Thomas Jefferson, that before the Revolution Chesapeake planters “were a species of capital annexed to certain mercantile houses in London” with hereditary debts passing “from father to son for many generations.” His statements have generally been taken at face value, although they probably reflect just his particular circumstances as a man who made the unwise decision to take on both the assets and the liabilities of a wealthy but highly indebted father-in-law. There is little reason why we should extrapolate from Jefferson’s situation (compounded, of course, by his tendency for personal extravagance) to Virginia planters as a whole. Certainly, my studies of wealthy Maryland planters suggest not only that few planters or merchants in Maryland were especially indebted but also that the major problem regarding debt in eighteenth century Maryland was not excessive indebtedness but was probably a lack of access to affordable and available credit.

We need empirical evidence about debt levels among individuals because it is only through empirical data that we are able to answer some of the important questions that have obsessed historians and economists about credit in colonial British America since Adam Smith first formulated the major issues in the *Wealth of Nations*. Smith marvelled at how well the British colonies in the Americas had prospered since their foundation and argued that a good deal of their success came from capital derived from British sources, invested in the colonies. Smith raised a variety of questions which continue to grab our attention. Smith was interested in the extent of capital that was needed to make the plantations profitable and even more so with the source of that capital. In his view, the money came from Britain: “the prosperity of the English sugar colonies has been ... owing to the great riches of England, of which

a part has overflowed ...upon those colonies.”<sup>4</sup> Smith’s assumptions have been challenged by other historians, notably Richard Pares, who believed that most of the capital needs of the plantations were met by planters ploughing back profits into their plantations, and have been supported by other historians, such as Simon Smith, who believes that on balance Adam Smith’s formulations were essentially correct. Other questions that follow from such investigations include whether the colonists could obtain as much capital as they needed, or desired, from various sources; whether there was a particular culture of credit, peculiar to Anglo-American societies;<sup>5</sup> and whether that particular culture of credit, in the special circumstances of the mid-eighteenth century, contributed to the making of the American Revolution.

Finally, the question of credit and debt is intimately connected to slavery and the slave trade. Slaves were expensive commodities and planters were hungrier for slaves than for any other commodity. They demanded, and received, generous credit terms from first the Royal African Company (whose loans to West Indian planters amounted to hundreds of thousands pounds sterling and whose largesse was a significant factor in kick-starting the West Indian plantation system) and then from private traders. Merchants fought against planter determination to engineer overly favourable credit legislation for themselves by introducing credit control practices in the 1690s and by supporting comprehensive legislation in the 1730s – the 1732 Colonial Debts Act – that provided the institutional means for securing confidence in the credit system for both planters and merchants. The passage of the Act, and gradual refinement of the credit system through the adoption of the immediate remittance system, favoured large planters and big merchants and provided a mechanism, alongside improvements in other aspects of the British Atlantic Slave trade system,

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<sup>4</sup> Adam Smith, *An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations*, ed. E. Cannan (2 vols. Chicago, 1976; orig. publ. 1776), II: 101.

<sup>5</sup> Margot Finn; T.H. Breen; Jamie Belich.

that allowed for a rapid expansion of West Indian economies after the War of the Austrian Succession and especially after the conclusion of the Seven Years' War.

Nevertheless, as Simon Smith points out, the central question posed by Adam Smith remains unresolved.<sup>6</sup> We do not know enough about the actual practices of local and British merchants in their lending practices and in particular do not have sufficient number of loan portfolios available for analysis to be able to make firm statements one way or another about the origin of the working capital. Thus, it is difficult to know what form credit took in the plantation colonies because, besides Simon Smith's recreation of Henry Lascelles' West Indian loans ca. 1753, no individual recreations of major money lenders in West Indian societies have been done.

Sources do exist that allow us to recreate individual loan portfolios and to aggregate individual debt positions. In Maryland, an extraordinary source exists – administration accounts – that allow historians to determine with a good deal of accuracy individual indebtedness. I used these sources for my study of wealthy eighteenth century Maryland planters, *Creole Gentlemen*. Administration accounts detailed the size of personal estates, the costs of estate settlement (which could be considerable), and listed debts owed by the estate to creditors. When administration accounts are combined with listing of debts that were owed to decedents listed in inventories, we can work out both gross and net personal wealth. I have done this for wealthy Maryland men, establishing that these men owed on average about 30 percent of the value of their non-landed estates in the form of debts. I have collected several hundred administration accounts from less wealthy Marylanders which I intend one

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<sup>6</sup> Simon Smith, 171.

day to integrate with those already analysed in order to create a more complete picture of indebtedness in eighteenth century Maryland.

Inventories, the major source of my analysis in this paper, are not as useful a source for analysing credit and debt, as what is listed are only debts as financial assets rather than debts as financial liabilities. Nevertheless, they provide a snapshot of one important aspect of credit in plantation economies. An inventory was a listing of all personal assets owned by a recently deceased person at the time of death. In Jamaica, the two largest items in most inventories were slaves (accounting for 35 percent of the average personal estate in Jamaica and 46 percent of the average personal estate of the 76 percent of testators who owned slaves) and debts (accounting for 40 percent of the average personal estate of those inventoried and 47 percent of the 56 percent of inventoried estates that carried debts). Two crucial questions we need to ask about inventories are the percentage of people who died each year that left inventories (my estimate is that it ranged from one third of people dying in the early eighteenth century to close to two thirds of non-transient men dying in the third quarter of the eighteenth century) and the extent to which the number of debts are accurately detailed in inventories.

In respect to the second question, coverage varies. Appraisers, especially as the eighteenth century proceeded, were very careful about detailing prices and names of slaves but were less rigorous about tabulating debts. Very often, debts were not enumerated but were aggregated. It was uncommon, moreover, for appraisers, when they did list individual debts, to note what type of debt – mortgage, bond, note and so on – was being described. Consequently, the picture we get of early Jamaican money-lending is incomplete. Moreover, appraisers did not always list debts even when it is very probable that the person they were appraising would have had a loan portfolio. In



Kingston, for example, there were 491 men who were described as either merchants or esquires but whose estates listed no loans. It is very likely that many of these men had debts owing to them that were not recorded in their inventoried wealth. John Nixon, for instance, was a merchant turned estate owner with an estate of £45,105 in 1774, none of which was in the form of debts. Similarly, John Hitchman (d. 1780), William Gordon (1776), James Ramadge (1758), David Tavares (1748) and Giles Diston (1733) were Kingston merchants leaving large estates between £10,000 and £20,000 in which there were no debts listed. Conversely, a number of inventories – 311 (3.3 percent of the total) listed only debts. Some of these inventories may be additional inventories to inventories that are missing or which I have yet to reconcile. Most important, as has been already mentioned, we have no sense from inventories whether the amount lent owed was matched or exceeded by what was owed. Inventories give us very full information about gross wealth but are not very helpful when it comes to examining net assets. But there are sufficiently detailed estates, in which debts are tabulated carefully and described in detail, that we can recreate at least one part of loan portfolios held by rich Jamaicans. Eventually I hope to be able to link the names listed in loan portfolios with other records in order to determine credit and debt networks and to ascertain what sorts of people were borrowing from whom and vice versa.

A final weakness in the sources used is that they reveal little about the ultimate source of capital lent out on loan. Was it obtained mostly from Britain, as Adam and Simon Smith assert? Was it derived from plantation produce, from piracy, or from trade with Spanish America, as other historians suggest? We don't know. Probably working capital emanated from a combination of the above sources, although the precise contribution of any one source to the whole is indeterminate. The amounts of

debts noted in inventories certainly out-swamped, as one would expect, hard currency reserves in the island. The total amount of debts recorded in the inventories I have examined came to £10,205,397 (40.6 percent of total personal wealth of £25,169,529), compared to £440,178 (1.7 percent) held as cash and £249,013 (1 percent) comprised of Spanish or English silver.

## OVERALL TRENDS

We can make some general observations about levels of debt in Jamaica from what is noted about credit in inventories. First, the amount of credit that was lent out by Jamaicans to Jamaicans was considerable. The average estate contained £1,090 in debts. If we confine ourselves just to estates that list debts, the amount held in the form of debts increases to £1,946. Many Jamaicans lent out vastly more than that sum. Of the 227 people who died with estates valued at more than £20,000, the average amount of debt per estate was £20,993 and total debts were £4,765,548. The average amount of debts owing held by the 209 people who had very large estates and who listed debts in their inventories were £22,889. The biggest money lenders lent seriously large sums of money. There were fifteen men (eight of whom were Kingston merchants) who lent out more than £60,000, with Sir Simon Clarke, Edward Foord, Samuel Delpratt, Peter Beckford, Aaron Baruh Lousada, John Morse, and George Paplay each outlaying more than £100,000 in loans to other Jamaicans. To keep this in perspective, only one man in colonial Maryland – Charles Carroll of Annapolis – lent money on the Jamaican scale, with £57,400 out on loan in 1776. Virtually no-one else in Maryland at the start of the American Revolution had more than £15,000 out in loans.

Second, the amount of money lent out increased considerably over time. During the eighteenth century, it became ever more common for white Jamaicans to

lend money to fellow Jamaicans. The percentage of inventories containing debts increased from 43.3 percent for people dying before 1700 to 60.7 percent for people dying after 1749. Consequently, the average amount that debt made up of the average estate increased over time as well: from under 20 percent for people dying before 1720 to over 30 percent for people dying after 1764. By the early 1780s, 35 percent of the average Jamaican estate was in the form of debts. The percentage that debts made up of estates containing debts did not increase as quickly over time, reflecting the fact that the incidence of money lending was growing during the eighteenth century, but it did increase appreciably, from 38 percent for creditors dying before 1700 to 50 percent for creditors dying after 1750.

What is especially noticeable is how much the size of credits in the average estate increased over time. The data in Table One shows that whereas in the late seventeenth century, the average total of credits per annum in Jamaican inventories was just over £7,000, that sum tripled by the second decade of the eighteenth century, more than tripled again in the next decade before doubling in the 1740s and then increasing by a further 60 percent in the boom years after the end of Tacky's War. In part this increase is a statistical artefact. The percentage of people inventoried probably doubled from the 1670s to the 1770s, meaning that the size of the pool of potential creditors inventoried greatly increased. But the increase in the amount of money lent out as revealed in inventories also reflects growing Jamaican prosperity. By the 1760s, a tabulation of debts in inventories suggests that every year 160 decedents lent out over £230,000 to fellow Jamaicans. As the white adult male population in the 1760s was around 5,000, of whom at least half would have been wealth-holders, the amount lent out in any given year within Jamaica should probably be increased around fifteen-fold, to near £3.5 million.

Not surprisingly, credits were key components of individual wealth. Although no debts were recorded in 45.3 percent of inventories (undoubtedly underestimating the numbers of people who lent money to others) and although nearly 60 percent of all testators had estates in which money lent out comprised less than 20 percent of their personal estate, there were 1,542 people (16.5 percent of all testators) for whom debt comprised between 60 and 99 percent of their personal wealth. A considerable percentage of these moneylenders lived in Kingston and surrounding areas. Jamaican whites tended to congregate in towns – 27.3 percent of inventories belonged to residents of Kingston and 39.4 percent belonged to residents of the adjoining parishes of Kingston, Port Royal and St Andrew. Urban Jamaicans had more than their share of monies lent out on loan: 45 percent of money lent out in Jamaica belonged to residents of Kingston, Port Royal or St Andrew, with residents of Kingston alone accounting for 39 percent of monies lent out. People living in Britain accounted for a further 7 percent of monies lent out with residents of St Catherine, which contained the colonial capital and small town, St Jago de la Vaga, holding 12.1 percent of debts. Finally, Kingston merchants played a major role in facilitating credit in the island. I will deal with this subject at length below. Before doing that, however, I need to briefly outline the importance of slavery and the slave trade in credit-debt relations in Jamaica and need to provide details about Kingston so as to illustrate the general context within which Kingston merchants worked.

## KINGSTON

Kingston has a marginal place in early American historiography. The town is seldom given the attention it deserves as one of the principal towns in British America during the eighteenth century, both in terms of population and especially in terms of wealth. Kingston deserves our attention if only because it was the leading slave port

in the British Atlantic in the period of its greatest activity, with nearly 900,000 Africans arriving in the port between its founding in 1692 and the end of the slave trade in 1807.<sup>7</sup> Many of these slaves were shipped out again to Spanish America, the locus of much of Kingston's activities and the source of much of its wealth. A well-informed account of Britain's American colonies in the mid 1740s thought that Jamaica was the most substantial financial contributor to the British Empire, with its trade to Spanish America at £900,000 per annum in 1745, making its total trade worth £1,500,000, compared to New England's £1 million.<sup>8</sup> But these facts are little known because what is noticeable about Kingston is the silence that surrounds it in the literature. Apart from Colin Clarke, professor of geography emeritus at Oxford, who has written a survey of Kingston over its whole history, with relatively little attention being given to its eighteenth century roots, virtually nothing has been written on eighteenth century Kingston. When people think of British American port cities, they think of Boston, New York, Pennsylvania and Charleston, never considering that by 1788 Kingston was larger in population than both Charleston and Boston and not much less populous than New York.<sup>9</sup> When they think of Jamaica, they think of the plantation system and planters in the country and seldom consider the contribution that the town of Kingston made to Jamaican prosperity. Unfortunately, what we have mostly is silence on Kingston, on its trade, its wealth and its people. Today therefore what I want to say about Kingston, a place that eventually I want to write a social history of its development between 1745 and 1780, is necessarily rudimentary and preparatory in nature.

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<sup>7</sup> Trevor Burnard and Kenneth Morgan, "The Dynamics of the Slave Market and Slave Purchasing Patterns in Jamaica, 1655-1788," *William and Mary Quarterly*, 3d Ser., LVIII (2001), 205-228.

<sup>8</sup> Kenneth Morgan, "Robert Dinwiddie's Reports on the British American Colonies," *William and Mary Quarterly*, 3d Ser., LXV (2008), 305-46.

<sup>9</sup> Jacob Price, for example, did not deal with Kingston in his influential "Economic Function and the Growth of American Port Towns in the Eighteenth Century," *Perspectives in American History*, X (1976), 121-86.

If historians have overstressed the importance of cities in British North America, the opposite is true for the British Caribbean.<sup>10</sup> The great wealth that sugar brought to West Indian planters has focused historical attention overwhelmingly on the dynamic of the plantation system. The lack of works on Kingston and Bridgetown have misled colonial British American historians to think that Charleston in South Carolina was the only urban centre of any size in plantation America. But Kingston was more important than Charleston. Before and immediately after the American Revolution, it had more people than Charleston, supported a larger and more flourishing merchant class, was much more than was Charleston a centre for female economic and social involvement, and was more important, for free people at least, in the context of Jamaica's demography and economy than Charleston was in the context of South Carolina.<sup>11</sup> Informed contemporaries knew that Kingston was more important than Charleston. Here's Lowbridge Bright, a scion of a well-placed Bristol family with long connections to Kingston, on the deficiencies of Charleston on the eve of the Stamp Act crisis:

I think the trade of this place is greatly overdone. Make no doubt but you might sell goods and negroes enough, but it would be impossible to get payment in any reasonable time. The gentlemen of this place are much in debt; the whole produce of the country is not more than three hundred and twenty thousand pounds sterling per annum to take off which here are full 100 stores

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<sup>10</sup> Of the few works on Kingston, see Trevor Burnard, "The Grand Mart of the Island": The Economic Function of Kingston, Jamaica in the Mid-Eighteenth Century," in Kathleen E.A. Monteith and Glen Richards, ed., *Jamaica in Slavery and Freedom: History, Heritage and Culture* (Kingston, Jamaica: UWI Press, 2002), 225-41; Wilma Bailey, "Kingston 1692-1843: A Colonial City," (unpublished PhD, University of the West Indies, 1974), and Colin G. Clark, *Kingston, Jamaica: Urban Development and Social Change, 1692-1962* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1975).

<sup>11</sup> For eighteenth century Charleston, see, inter alia, Philip D. Morgan, "Black Life in Eighteenth - Century Charleston," *Perspectives in American History*, new ser., 1 (1984), 187-232; S. Max Edelson, *Plantation Enterprise in Colonial South Carolina* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 2006), ch.4 and Emma Hart, "'The Middling Order are Odious Characters': Social Structure and Urban Growth in Colonial Charleston, South Carolina," *Urban History* 34 (2007), 209-226.

of dry goods and ship chandlery &tc which with the negroes that are annually imported, rum from the West Indies, flour &tc from Philadelphia and new York, and the money spent in England, must necessarily exceed that sum ... Though the business of this place (by means of their connections) enables the natives to live genteelly, yet it would be difficult in any reasonable time to make a fortune sufficient to return to England, very few instances of which can be produced; which would be the great object I should have in view, to enable me to return as soon as possible to my native country, and settle amongst my friends.<sup>12</sup>

From the perspective of someone oriented in Kingston, the North American port cities were not especially impressive. Kingston was wealthier and, to some commentators at least, was more beautiful. Lord Adam Gordon on a trip to British America in 1764 thought the town “very considerable, being large and well Inhabited, the Streets spacious and regularly laid out,” as befitted “the most ... trading Town in the island.”<sup>13</sup>

The major problem with Kingston was its mortality rate. It was, as Gordon admitted, “a very unwholesome place,” “often visited by sickness”. It was a charnel house where approximately one in five whites died every year. Just to maintain population, Kingston (a town with only a few thousand whites) needed to import 250 to 300 people per annum. Mortality rates were at levels normally that were only attained in peak years of plague in seventeenth century London and in years of crisis

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<sup>12</sup> Lowbridge Bright, Charleston, to Henry Bright, Bristol, 30 March 1764, in Kenneth Morgan, ed., *The Bright-Meyler Papers: A Bristol-West India Connection, 1732-1787* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 388-9.

<sup>13</sup> Lord Adam Gordon, in Newton D. Mereness, ed., *Travels in the American Colonies* (New York: Macmillan Company, 1916), 377.

mortality far outstripped mortality rates elsewhere in the empire.<sup>14</sup> But despite horrific mortality, Kingston grew impressively over the eighteenth century. Between 1730 and 1788 the population increased from 4,461 to 26,748, making it the third largest town in the English-speaking Americas. The great majority of these people were slaves, who accounted for 16,659 of the population in 1788. But the town was also the centre of free coloured life in the island with 2,690 free coloureds and 570 free blacks. The number of whites was considerable – 6,539 in a population of whites in the island somewhat below 20,000. One of the little appreciated features of Kingston is that it became more a locus of white and free coloured life in Jamaica over time. Jamaica became increasingly urbanised over the eighteenth century. The proportion of Jamaica's population which lived in Kingston grew from 5.3 per cent to 10.5 percent between 1730 and 1788. By contrast, rates of urbanisation in British North America fell appreciably over the same period. Moreover, a much greater percentage of free people lived in Jamaican towns than in North America. By the time of the American Revolution, over 40 percent of whites and free coloureds lived in Kingston. These figures are enhanced further if we break them down by gender. Free women did not like to live in the countryside but enjoyed the relative freedom and abundance of amenities, especially opportunities for shopping and merchandising, which were in the town. The gender imbalance towards women was most notable in the free coloured population, where women outnumbered men (1,683 to 1,597) but was also apparent in the white population. Whereas one third of white Jamaican men lived in Kingston in 1788, over 40 percent of white women lived in the town. This does not mean that white women dominated the demography of Kingston – they were only 27 percent of the white population and 7 percent of the total population – but it did mean

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<sup>14</sup> Trevor Burnard, "'The Countrie Continues Sicklie': White Mortality in Jamaica, 1655-1780," *Social History of Medicine*, 12 (1999), 53-9.



that there was a notable female orientation to the town absent from the rural sections of Jamaica. In the countryside, white men might hardly encounter a white woman; in Kingston white women were a noticeable feature of the landscape. They had a real presence not only in numbers but in social clout. Kingston had, mainly as a result of its dire mortality statistics but also because of a propensity for widowed women to remain single rather than remarry. In 1770, women were the household heads in 279 of 1026 households. Women accounted for 27 percent of household heads compared to North America where in 1790 females headed less than 8 percent of all households.<sup>15</sup>

What marked Kingston out most is that it was a primary centre of slavery. Not that many white people may have spent time in Kingston, although my supposition is that there were a lot more people who lived and died in Kingston than we might have thought (parish registers note nearly 18,000 deaths between 1722 and 1774, suggesting that between 20,000 and 30,000 Europeans lived, worked or died in the town in the second and third quarters of the eighteenth century). But Kingston was a centre of black life in the New World, second perhaps only to Rio de Janeiro in being a fulcrum through which Africans had to pass before becoming slaves. Moreover, Rio is more important than Kingston in this respect mainly because of the length of time that slave trading and slavery lasted in the city. If we look just at the eighteenth century, when slave trading was at its height and when the argument about the morality of slavery and especially the Atlantic slave trade became a central part of

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<sup>15</sup> For data and sources on Kingston's population, see Burnard, "Grand Mart," and *ibid*, "Countrie Remains Sicklie." The principal primary sources used in this paper are Kingston Parish Registers, 1722-1775, Island Record Office, Twickenham, Jamaica, Kingston Vestry Minutes, Poll Tax Lists, 1745-1779, IB/2/6/1-7 and Inventories, IB1/11/3/1-65, 1674-1785, Jamaica Archives, Spanishtown, Jamaica. Population figures are derived from Census 1730, C.O. 137/19 (pt.2)/48; Census 1774, C.O. 137/70/88; Census 1788, 137/87, National Archives, Kew, London, "Statistics of Jamaica 1739-1775," Long Mss., Add. Mss. 12,435, f. 41, British Library. For the percentage of households in the United States in 1790 that were female, see Daniel Scott Smith, "Female Householding in Late Eighteenth-Century America and the Problem of Poverty," *Journal of Social History*, 28 (1994), 83.

Enlightenment discourse, then Kingston was the centre of slave life in the New World.<sup>16</sup>

Slavery was important in Kingston in three ways. First, it was the foundation of its economy. The importation of African slaves into the Americas was the largest and most complex international business of the eighteenth century. Jamaica had an insatiable desire for slaves which was mainly satisfied by the merchants of Kingston. Between 1700 and 1758 Kingston was the sole port of entry for Africans shipped into Jamaica and the major port for such shipments 1758-1807. During this time nearly 830,000 slaves were imported into Jamaica (another 150,000 were shipped there and then sent to Spanish America). Assuming an average price per slave of £30, the total value of this trade amounted to nearly £25 million, or close to the total wealth of Jamaica in 1774. Perhaps £200,000 per annum passed through the hands of Kingston merchants. The transit of slaves and their processing was Kingston's principal business.<sup>17</sup> Henry Bright, a Bristol factor resident in Kingston called the trade to Africa the "chief motive of people venturing their fortunes abroad."<sup>18</sup> Alexander Harvie, a Kingston merchant financed by the Lascelles family of Yorkshire and London and who died in 1765 echoed that view: "There is one trade by much the most beneficial of any carried on from Europe to the British West Indies which the people of Glasgow seem to take no notice of and that is the trade to the Coast of Africa for slaves by which the people of Liverpool have enriched themselves."<sup>19</sup> Second, it was the defining status for the majority of Kingston's population. Nearly 60 percent of Kingston's population were slaves and as Kingston was the principal market for slave goods in the island was the place where slaves flocked from throughout the island.

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<sup>16</sup> See Mary Karasch, *Slave Life in Rio de Janeiro* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1987).

<sup>17</sup> Burnard and Morgan, "Dynamics of the Slave Market."

<sup>18</sup> Henry Bright, Kingston, to Richard Meyler II, Bristol, 25 July 1750, in Morgan, *Bright-Meyler Papers*, 226.

<sup>19</sup> Cited in Smith, 195-96.

Europeans (most whites were recent migrants from Britain, either southern England or lowland Scotland) congregated in the town, despite the likelihood of early death, because they believed they could make lots of money through the trade that abounded in the town. The average estate of 2,349 Kingstonians who left inventories of their personal estate between 1715 and 1783 was £2,811.62 (£2,008.30 sterling). The average estate in England and Wales at this time is estimated to be £52, perhaps £100 if one only counts householders. By both British and North American standards, the wealth of Kingston was colossal. Only the top ten percent of decedents in Philadelphia, the richest city in British North America, achieved these levels of wealth. Moreover, wealth was greater at most levels, except at the very bottom decile of inventoried persons, than in northern port towns. Immigrants to Kingston were as rich as anyone in British America except perhaps white inhabitants of Jamaica's countryside. At the top levels, wealth levels were extraordinary. The largest estate recorded was that of Zachary Bayly, a merchant prince, eugolised by his nephew and heir, the historian Bryan Edwards (oh that all we historians could claim such bounteous inheritances) as a man of considerable liberal sentiments and Enlightenment principles. Bayly left a personal estate of £115,000 sterling, including over 1,000 slaves on his extensive sugar estates in St. Mary (from one of which, incidentally, the rebels who nearly destroyed Jamaica in Tacky's revolt in 1760 hailed). With real estate, his property would have been well over £200,000 – equivalent to a senior aristocratic estate.

#### KINGSTON MERCHANTS

Although money lending was general at all levels of wealth in Kingston, as can be seen in the breakdown of debt by occupation in Table Two, the most active and important money-lenders were merchants and people in commercial occupations.

Of the nearly £4 million debts recorded in inventories of Kingston residents, £3,366,300.07 was held by men denoted as esquires, merchants, shopkeepers, hucksters, or gentlemen (the last tending to be men preparing to become merchants who died before they achieved their aim). Men in commerce were responsible for 85 percent of money lent out that was recorded in Kingston inventories. Men termed esquires or merchants owned the vast majority - £3,225,994.20 – of this debt. The average amount of debts held by merchants was £4,615.16, with men denoted as esquires having an average of £9,053.94 in credits.

As one might expect, the largest money lenders monopolised the debt market. There were 59 estates of Kingston residents valued at £20,000 or more. These men were owed £2,030,133.96, which was 51.3 percent of Kingston debt. Money lending was a substantial part of the wealth portfolios of very wealthy Kingstonians, with the average percentage of total estate value made up by debts being 68 percent. Another way of looking at large scale money lending is to examine the debt portfolios of the 78 people who were owed at least £10,000. Their total money lending was £2,334,406.17 or 58.9 percent of total Kingston credit. Among these large money lenders, as Table Five details, were ten men (including Foord and Delpratt) who were owed more than £50,000; 16 people with debts between £25,000 and £50,000; and 52 with debts between £10,000 and £25,000. Many of these money lenders had the great majority of their estate in the form of debts. There were 54 Kingstonians who had more than £10,000 lent out and more than 80 percent of their estate as money lent out. They were relatively small scale slave owners, given the size of their estates, owning 1,343 slaves in total but £1,587,720.41 in debts. Typical was Solomon Nunes Flamingo, who died with an estate of £21,356, including 6 slaves and with debts of

£20,389, or 95 percent of his estate. Joseph Hutchinson was another with most his estate - £25,125 of £27,146 – made up of debts.

Reconstructing the individual loan portfolios of both large and small merchants gives more in depth information about the nature and extent of money lending in Kingston and Jamaica. Jamaican money lenders were more willing to lend both small and large sums to debtors than were Henry Lascelles, whose mid-eighteenth century lending practices have been analysed by Simon Smith. Between 1723 and 1753, Lascelles lent out £226,772 sterling to 78 people, for an average loan of £2,907.33 sterling. Samuel Delpratt, either by himself or with his partners, Foord and Clark, made 351 separate loans to 328 people. Sir Simon Clarke made 132 loans to 126 people. Delpratt made 149 loans that were less than £100 and 82 loans that were between £100 and £249. Clarke made 80 loans that were less than £250. Delpratt's average loan was £1,062.75 while Clarke's average loan was £1,749.61.

Nevertheless, the great majority of money lending was to a few highly leveraged people. Delpratt made 10 loans of over £10,000 and a further 10 loans of between £2,500 and £10,000, accounting for £282,339.39, or 75.7 percent of all money lent out. Clarke lent 14 loans of over £2,500, amounting to £190,303.70 or 82.4 percent of his loan portfolio. The biggest loans were made as mortgages. Delpratt and his partners had 12 mortgages outstanding owed to them, valued at £205,688.47 or 55.1 percent of his loan portfolio. Bonds accounted for a further 30.1 percent of all debts while 108 debts made as notes accounted for 5.4 percent of money lent out. Clarke made 9 mortgages worth £121,660.52 and 66 bonds worth £88,736.20, accounting for 91.1 percent of all his debts. Some of these mortgages and bonds were truly gargantuan. Clarke lent £47,884.97 to Wheeler Fearon and £20,221.23 to Fearon's kinsman, Thomas Fearon. He also lent £35,435.81 on mortgage to the estate

of John Reid (deceased). Delpratt and partners were the major creditors for four sugar estates. They lent £40,923.26 to Clifton Hall and Marlborough Estates; £31,062.64 to Mount Sinan Estate; £30,212.84 to Burlington Estate and £34,680.44 to the Bondbrogen Estate of Mrs. Sarah Gale.

What these figures suggest is that merchants such as Samuel Delpratt and Edward Foord parlayed the money they made through slave trading into money lending. Unlike some merchants, like Zachary Bayly, Alexander Harvie and Thomas Hibbert, who diverted some of their profits into buying sugar estates stocked with hundreds of slaves, Delpratt and Foord remained Kingston merchants, with relatively small slaveholdings. The three partners owned 192 slaves between them, with the largest slave owning being that of Foord with 69 slaves. In the absence of other evidence, we don't know how the three merchants acquired slaves or what use they put those slaves to but it is possible that a number of the slaves that the three men owned were gained as an outcome of defaulted debts rather than for productive use. These men concentrated on money lending rather than planting. But their wealth was dependent on the success of planting, given that 75.6 percent of their credits were large loans of £10,000 or more, seemingly to finance expenditure on large sugar estates.

The loan portfolios of merchants, all dying in 1782, further down the food chain, show how people other than large sugar planters could borrow money from Kingston money lenders. Judith Gordon, for example, had £3,658.37 out on loan in the form of 8 bonds and 6 notes. The great majority of the monies in these loans - £3,427.34 or 93.7 percent - was lent to a single individual, John Hitchman, a Kingston merchant. George Campbell did not have a large loan portfolio - he had only 6 loans. Of these, 4 went to people borrowing between £250 and £500 and only

one was a small loan, of £16.76. Other money lenders, however, specialised in small loans. David Austin made 32 loans, totalling £1,408.72, of which all were under £130. Thomas Russell, a more substantial money lender than Austin, was even more catholic in his lending practices. He tended to deal with ship captains and mariners and made 138 loans, worth £7,938.16, with the average loan being £57.52 and 120 loans being less than £100.

What can we make of these loan portfolios and of money lending by Kingstonians in general? More work needs to be done in examining individual loan portfolios in order to determine the relative importance of large and small loans and the breakdown of loans between mortgages, bonds, bills of exchange, judgments and notes. The analysis to date, however, does indicate that Jamaicans did not necessarily have to turn to Britain, or even to planters like Sir Simon Clarke, for their credit needs. Kingston merchants were an important source of capital needs, whether the needs were for a small amount of money or for a substantial sum, secured under mortgage.

#### THOMAS HIBBERT

There are many people I would like to know more about from eighteenth century Jamaica than I do but one person that I am particularly interested in knowing more about is Kingston's leading merchant in the third quarter of the eighteenth century, Thomas Hibbert. He is interesting for a variety of reasons. First, he was immensely rich. His merchant house was not only the largest in Kingston but was legendary for its solidity and commercial probity. His bonds were reckoned the closest thing there was to government bonds, with fellow merchants thinking of them in the way that people in London would have thought of financial instruments issued by the Bank of England. His money was mostly gained through slave trading, his

house being the most substantial slave trading house in Kingston, responsible for annual importations of over 1,000 slaves in the 1760s and probably more in the 1770s. He died in 1780 without, as far as I am aware, leaving an inventory of his personal possessions. His wealth, however, must have been extraordinary. The three principals of another large Kingston merchant house that was reckoned to be some way below that of Hibbert Purrier and Hibbert left personal estate of over £200,000. The largest contemporary estate I have found, that of Sir Simon Clarke of Hanover Parish, was just over £250,000. Hibbert's would have been as large as that, perhaps larger, putting him in elevated company not just in Jamaica but in England. Similar wealth in the hands of William Beckford allowed him to become Lord Mayor of London and to marry his children into the English aristocracy. Beckford's heir, William Beckford of Fonthill, the Gothic novelist and author of *Vathek*, was reputed the richest man in the empire in the 1780s. Hibbert and his family had similar ducal incomes, sufficient for him to purchase several large sugar estates in northern Jamaica and for his nephew and heir, Thomas Hibbert, Jr., to buy a large property in the very expensive environs of southern Buckinghamshire, at Chalfont St Peter. Second, Hibbert is a one person confirmation of Eric Williams' famous thesis of Caribbean slavery forming the basis of the industrial revolution. Although there is not much evidence that Hibbert put his slave derived wealth into manufactures, he was from the heartland of the industrial revolution, being born in Manchester in 17094, moving to Kingston as a young man in 1734 and, after prospering, dying in Kingston on 20 May 1780. Third, his career and his descendants exemplify much of the complications surrounding the problem of slavery in late eighteenth century Britain. Hibbert's wealth was derived mainly out of his involvement in the Atlantic slave trade and as the middleman in the consignment system that linked Britain with Kingston and with the wider plantation economy. His



own views about slavery are unknown although it is recorded that he chaired a debate in 1776 in Kingston over the morality of the slave trade – a debate on such a subject in such a place at such a time about which one can only wring one’s hand against human hypocrisy and life’s ironies. Not surprisingly, given the source of his wealth, his heirs, notably George Hibbert, a leading British West Indian merchant in early nineteenth century London and MP for the major pro-slavery constituency of Seaford, were notable supporters of slavery and opponents of the abolition of the slave trade. His sole direct descendant, however, was a coloured woman, Jane Harry Thresher, daughter of Hibbert from a liaison between him and a free coloured woman, named Charity Harry. If Jane had been the legitimate progeny of Hibbert and a white wife, she would have been the greatest heiress in England. As it was, she was given a small fortune and was treated contemptuously by her cousins, Hibbert’s nephews, who refused to treat her as a member of the Hibbert family. Educated expensively in England, she was cut adrift soon after her father’s death. She became a governess and joined the Quakers. Horrified that her mother had inherited slaves from her father’s will, she became an ardent abolitionist, determined to free her mother’s slaves through a personal visit to Jamaica. That didn’t happen but in another delicious irony the sole descendant of Jamaica’s greatest slave trader became an abolitionist three or four years before the beginning of the organised movement in Britain against the slave trade. She died in 1784, in childbirth, along with an infant son.

Finally, and most important for our purposes here today, Thomas Hibbert is of interest because he clearly imbibed many Enlightenment principles, as might be guessed at given his participation in the macabre debate by slave owners and slave traders in Kingston on the seemingly imaginary and fanciful notion that slaves might be free. We can see these principles best expressed in his directions for how his death

was to be commemorated. In his will, proven 10 June 1780, he began his instructions to administrators with a long diatribe about how he was to be buried, declaiming that “in order to show my detestation and abhorrence of the prevailing superstitious custom of Interning dead bodies in Churches and Church yards and to prevent mine being added to the noxious Mass that is daily Corrupting in the Centre of the Town, I desire that my executors will see it placed in the deep Vault which I have provided for that purpose in the Garden belonging to my House in Kingston with the least expense consistent with decency.” His house was the grandest in Kingston, having been erected, it is claimed, in competition with three other wealthy men in order to see who could build the most expensive and best house in the town. Hibbert apparently won that contest, by general acclaim.

His concern about his reputation and his championing of forward thinking secular materialism was manifest in what was an even more lasting memorial than his house. This was a very grand monument in his memory put atop the place he was actually buried in, a vault at the top of a hill in St. Mary Parish in northern Jamaica on his sugar estate, Agualta Vale. We see it commemorated in a fine painting done in 1824 by James Hakewill and published in a set of engravings of plantation views. The verses on the monument defiantly flout the authority of organised religion, showing Hibbert as a determined free thinker:

This tribute to the dead, no church's care,  
Nor solemn sprinkling boasts, nor prelate's prayer,  
But rites more sacred sanctify the dust  
Where rest rever'd, the ashes of the just;  
Pray'rs from the poor, that sooner reach the sky,  
And holier drops that fall from friendship's eye.

Hibbert's monument claims the right to determine the bounds of virtue in maintaining that despite lying outside the sanctity of churchyard, he had been a just and benevolent man, even if irreligious.

The painting itself is an interesting commentary on the Jamaican plantocracy's assumptions of legitimacy, as Vincent Brown astutely points out. Hakewill sees slavery as being a serene institution, sanctified by history in the form of Hibbert's classically inspired pastoral vision of entombment. The centre is occupied not by the monument but by a white gentleman and a black enslaved person. As Brown says, the relationship between the master and the slave anchors the social meaning of the monument. The master, directing the slave's attention to the monument, makes him note the prominence of the dead slaveholder – possibly the man who was instrumental in bringing his ancestors from Africa to Jamaica – while suggesting through the attentive and slightly bowed head of the slave, situated behind and below the white gentleman, that a man like Thomas Hibbert was someone whom a black servant should naturally appreciate and think a great, if irreligious, patriot. It is among the most interesting of all Hakewill's prints, enjoining history and memory to Hakewill's persistent vision of plantations as magnificent and productive places where contented slaves worked dutifully to help implant British civilisation.

Table One: Sum of Loans Recorded in Jamaican Inventories, 1674-1784

Years	No. Inventories	Ave. Debt Per Annum	Ave. Inventory Debt
1684-1690	386	£7,149	£129.61
1711-1716	477	£23,370	£293.96
1724-33	911	£77,511	£850.84
1740-53	2123	£148,287	£977.87
1761-84	3663	£234,408	£1,407.86

Table Two: Debt as a Percentage of Total Personal Estate Value

Debt/TEV	N. (All)	%	Cum. %	% (Debtors)	Cum. %
0	4137	45.3	45.3	0	0
1-20%	1398	15.0	59.2	26.9	26.9
21-40%	1073	11.5	70.7	20.6	47.4
41-60%	886	9.5	80.2	17.0	64.4
61-80%	820	8.8	89.0	15.7	80.1
81-99%	722	7.7	96.7	13.9	94.0
100%	311	3.3	100.0	6.0	100.0

Table Three: Money Lending by Residence of Creditors

Region	N.	N. Debt	Total Debt	% Total Debt	Average Debt/TEV
Kingston	2351	1362	3979442	39.1	30.0
Greater Kingston	3396	1828	4587719	45.0	27.0
East	710	404	437554	4.3	24.0
Central	2258	1353	2146476	21.0	26.0
North	884	508	859840	8.4	24.0
West	1284	747	1244715	12.3	26.0
Outside Jamaica			910665	8.9	

Table Four: Creditors in Kingston by Selected Occupation

Occupation	N.	N. Debt	Sum Debt	Average Debt	Debt/TEV
Esquire	132	96	1195121	9054.94	40
Merchants	567	419	2030874	3581.79	46
Shopkeepers	96	62	35171	567.28	24
Gentlemen	285	148	105135	368.90	25
Tradesmen	345	175	176441	512.00	24
Mariner	208	116	72537	348.73	32
Doctor	89	57	110099	1117.59	37

Table Five: Largest Creditors in Kingston

Name	Year	TEV	Credits	Debt/TEV
Edward Foord	1777	206,211	199,750	97
Samuel Delpratt	1784	198,702	194,824	98
Aaron Baruh Lousada	1768	116,475	105,492	91
George Paplay	1770	135,539	98,091	72
Malcolm Laing	1782	88,600	81,542	92
Jacob Lopez Torres	1768	72,440	69,594	96
Charles Mitchell	1762	62,706	68,941	72
Pancefort Miller	1727	77,755	60,868	72
Alexander Harvie	1765	95,992	53,985	56
John McLean	1765	55,645	51,539	93

Table Five: Composition of Credits, Samuel Delpratt and Sir Simon Clarke

Type of Loan	Samuel Delpratt			Sir Simon Clarke		
	N	Sum	%	N	Sum	%
Mortgages	12	205,688.47	55.1	9	121,660.52	52.7
Bonds	222	112,168.30	30.1	66	88,736.30	38.4
Bills/Judgments	9	35,233.99	9.4	28	18,218.99	7.9
Notes	108	19,934.86	5.4	29	2,332.40	1.0
Total	351	373,025.62	100.0	132	230,948.11	100.0

NB: Samuel Delpratt's credits come from the following three sources:

Samuel Delpratt- £39,711.03 Foord, Delpratt and Clarke - £94,755.59 Foord and

Delpratt - £238,559.00

Table Six: Size of Loans, Samuel Delpratt and Sir Simon Clarke

Samuel Delpratt

Sir Simon Clarke

Size	N	Sum	%	N	Sum	%
£10,000 +	10	£230,302.81	61.7	5	£136,691.44	59.2
£2500-10000	10	£52,035.58	13.9	9	£53,612.26	23.2
£1000-2500	19	£33,854.97	9.1	10	£17,051.21	7.4
£500-1000	32	£22,416.23	6.0	11	£7,789.46	3.4
£250-500	49	£17,745.33	4.8	17	£7,405.22	3.2
£100-250	82	£11,216.29	3.0	17	£5,860.25	2.5
Under £100	149	£5,454.41	1.5		£2,538.27	1.1
Total	351	£373,025.62	100		£230,948.11	100.0