

**Domestic Rituals: Marriage and Baptism in
British Plantation Colonies, 1650-1780**

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I. Introduction

The British plantation colonies were fertile in only one sense, as places where warm climates and rich soils produced exportable commodities that made some planters very rich. For Africans and Europeans and their descendents, Barbados, Jamaica, and South Carolina were often places of demographic decrease, where typical human reproductive activity usually failed to sustain population levels.¹ This basic demographic problem and the culture it engendered have led many historians to speak of the failure of the colonial project in the plantation regions, creating a historical literature of the Caribbean and the early South that reveals stunted, violent, and irreligious societies.² Mostly ignored by historians have been the ways in which residents of the plantation

¹ On the plantation colonies' demographic problems, see successive article of Trevor Burnard on Jamaica: "A Failed Settler Society: Marriage and Demographic Failure in Early Jamaica," *Journal of Social History* 28 (1994): 63-82; "Not a Place for Whites? Demographic Failure and Settlement in Comparative Context: Jamaica, 1655-1780," in *Jamaica in Slavery and Freedom: History, Heritage, and Culture* (Mona, Jamaica: University of the West Indies Press, 2002); "'The COUNTRY Continues Sicklie': White Mortality in Jamaica, 1655-1780," *Social History of Medicine* 12 (1999): 45-72. For Carolina: Philip D. Morgan, *Slave Counterpoint: Black Culture in the Eighteenth-Century Chesapeake and Lowcountry* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1998), 79-101; Peter A. Coclanis, *The Shadow of a Dream: Economic Life and Death in the South Carolina Low Country, 1670-1920* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989). For Barbados: Richard S. Dunn, *Sugar and Slaves: The Rise of the Planter Class in the English West Indies, 1624-1713* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1972), 77, 87, 106-110, 300-334 (including Jamaica and the Leeward Islands); Patricia A. Molen, "Population and Social Patterns in Barbados in the Early Eighteenth Century," *William and Mary Quarterly* 3rd Ser. 23 (1971): 287-300.

² In this school, see Peter Wood, *Black Majority: Negroes in Colonial South Carolina from 1670 Through the Stono Rebellion* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1974); Richard S. Dunn, *Sugar and Slaves: The Rise of the Planter Class in the English West Indies, 1624-1713* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1972); Carl and Roberta Bridenbaugh, *No Peace Beyond the Line: The English in the Caribbean, 1624-1690* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1972). For an account stressing the pathology of Jamaica's slave society, see Orlando Patterson, *The Sociology of Slavery: An Analysis of the Origins, Development, and Structure of Negro Slave Society in Jamaica* (Cranbury, NJ: Associated University Presses, 1969). But compare Larry Gragg, *Englishmen Transplanted: The English Colonization of Barbados, 1627-1660* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003); Jack P. Greene, *Imperatives, Behaviors, and Identities: Essays in Early American Cultural History* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1992), 13-112; and his helpful review "Society and Economy in the British Caribbean during the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries," *American Historical Review* 79, no. 5 (1974): 1499-1517, which deals with some of the above works. Compare also Trevor Burnard, *Mastery, Tyranny, and Desire: Thomas Thistlewood and His Slaves in the Anglo-Jamaican World* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004), 245-250; Karl Watson, *The Civilised Island Barbados: A Social History, 1750-1816* (Barbados: Caribbean Graphic Production, 1975); and Edward Brathwaite, *The Development of Creole Society in Jamaica, 1770-1820* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1971).

world forged new kinds of human communities, tragic as they might have been, in their ritual lives and in the context of the liturgy of the Church of England. In addition to their theological import, the Christian rites of passage of baptism and marriage were vital to the life of the European community in the plantation regions as rites that displayed the legitimacy of the sexuality and reproduction of Europeans. The emerging community of free persons of color and small numbers of slaves also found meaning in rites that had the power to constitute family life against the constant threats of a hostile planter and merchant elite committed to racial slavery and white supremacy. Privatizing marriage and baptism by celebrating them at home rather than in church, Europeans sought to reserve these rites and their legitimating power to themselves. Potentially meddling clergy and free persons of color thus found these domestic rituals largely beyond their control, while the enslaved majority was nearly completely cut off from them. Both situations were essential features of whites' control of the Christian ritual repertoire and its power in the plantation colonies. Their determination to control that ritual power reveals the interpretive danger of historians' long underestimation of the social and cultural power of Christianity in the plantation colonies.³

³ The emphasis on social pathology in the plantation colonies is often combined with a blindness to the presence of liturgical Christianity. A comparison of supposedly secular Caribbean colonists with religious New Englanders opens Michael Craton, "Reluctant Creoles: The Planter's World in the British West Indies," in *Strangers Within the Realm: Cultural Margins of the First British Empire*, eds. Bernard Bailyn and Philip D. Morgan, 314-362 (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1991). This is a typical move in much early American historiography that makes "[r]eligion in the colonial period...virtually synonymous with seventeenth-century New England Puritanism and eighteenth-century evangelical revivalism," notes John K. Nelson in *A Blessed Company: Parishes, Parsons, and Parishioners in Anglican Virginia, 1690-1776* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2001), 9. Historians not particularly concerned with religion have often taken contemporary evangelicals' critique of Anglicanism as definitive, as when Jack Greene concluded that the British Caribbean was "(e)very bit as competitive, exploitative, and materialistic as early Virginia" and that its residents paid "scant attention to religion." See Jack P. Greene, *Imperatives, Behaviors, and Identities: Essays in Early American Cultural History* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1992), 70. On efforts to undermine the "evangelical synthesis" that has missed liturgical religion in the archives, see the "Preface to the Updated Edition" in Patricia U. Bonomi, *Under the Cope of Heaven: Religion, Society, and Politics in Colonial America*,

II. Domestic Unions

The Church of England's Book of Common Prayer was quite specific in its direction that marriages were properly solemnized in the parish church.⁴ There the minister was supposed to be in control, able to exercise the church's authority over the marriage of its people. At home in England, the Church of England's authority over the sexual and domestic lives of its people was wide.⁵ The celebration of marriage was reserved to Anglican clergy, forcing even dissenters into the national church at a key moment in their lives and reserving the attendant fee for Anglican ministers. Church courts were charged with the punishment of sexual activity outside marriage in fornication and adultery. Vestries sought out the fathers of children born outside marriage and took responsibility for their support when none could be found. At death of a spouse, church courts and the lawyers who practiced in them regulated the disposal of assets and minors in the probate process. The couple who entered their parish church for a wedding in England thus submitted to the church's comprehensive supervision of marriage and unapproved deviations from it.

In the colonies, however, the great majority of marriages took place in homes rather than in parish churches. That location was symbolic of a general disruption of the Anglican church's discipline of domestic and sexual life in the plantation colonies. The

Updated ed., (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), xvi-xx. The present essay comes from a wider treatment of ritual life in the plantation colonies. See Nicholas M. Beasley, "Christian Liturgy and the Creation of British Slave Societies, 1650-1780," PhD diss., Vanderbilt University, 2006.

⁴ The 1662 Book of Common Prayer's "Form of Solemnization of Matrimony" directed that "the Persons to be married shall come into the body of the Church with their friends and neighbors." Moreover, the Canons of 1604 required marriage in church. See Edward Cardwell, ed., *Synodalia: A Collection of Articles of Religion, Canons, and Proceedings of Convocations in the Province of Canterbury* (Oxford: At the University Press, 1842, repr. Farnborough, England: Gregg Press, 1966), 282. Canon 62.

⁵ Lawrence Stone, *Uncertain Unions: Marriage in England, 1660-1753* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), 4, 13. Matters concerning marriage, sex, and separation were tried by diocesan consistory courts, using the canon law inherited from the medieval church. Chancery courts had jurisdiction in matters related to marriage settlements and trusts (13).

lack of Anglican bishops in early America meant that there were no episcopal courts for the punishment of vice. Colonial legislatures in Jamaica and Barbados banned the creation of any church courts that might perpetuate parts of an English system of discipline that colonists were glad to have left behind.⁶ Clergy in the colonies often complained to the Bishop of London and the S.P.G. about their lack of coercive authority.⁷ Their occasional efforts to create church courts, even those restricted to the discipline of wayward clergymen, were viewed with deep suspicion by the colonial political classes who felt themselves quite competent to regulate their family lives without the prying and expensive regulation of the church. As a result, many of the powers of an English bishop were vested in royal governors, including issuing marriage licenses and regulating probate matters. Marriage in houses was thus a fitting symbol of this quiet lay revolution against church discipline in the midst of colonization. At the same time, vestries wanted their clergy compliant, nearby, and ready to be summoned to perform pastoral rites, to minimize “ye Inconveniences to the Parishioners.”⁸ The

⁶ See Richard Hall, ed. *Acts, Passed in the Island of Barbados from 1643 to 1762* (London, 1764), 241-242 for “An Act to quiet the minds of the Inhabitants of this Island, against the terrors and apprehensions they are under of a Spiritual Court; and to provide that no Ecclesiastical Law or Jurisdiction, shall have power to enforce, confirm or establish any penal mulct or Punishment in any case whatsoever, within this Island,” legislation that alleged that such a court would “clash with the municipal laws of this Island, embarrass the Government, vex and torment the Gentry, depauperate the substantial Freeholders, and ruin the common People.” For context, see John E. Findling, “The Lowther-Gordon Controversy: Church and State in Barbados, 1711-1720,” *Journal of the Barbados Museum and Historical Society* 34, no. 3 (1973): 131-144. For the Jamaican legislation, see *The Laws of Jamaica: comprehending all the Acts in force, passed between the thirty-second year of the reign of King Charles the Second, and the thirty-third year of the Reign of King George the Third* (St. Jago de la Vega, Jamaica: Alexander Aikman, 1792), 337-339, for a law prohibiting the Bishop of London from gaining any “juridical authority or coercion, either spiritual or temporal, over the lay inhabitants of this island.” On colonial governors’ ecclesiastical authority and commissarial courts’ unpopularity in the thirteen colonies, see James B. Bell, *The Imperial Origins of the King’s Church in Early America, 1607-1783* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), 26-57, 65-71.

⁷ For instance, see Fulham Papers, 17:219-220. John Kelly, St. Elizabeth’s parish in Jamaica, response to queries. He complained that the lack of an “Ecclesiastical Law,” left the clergy like “soldiers going to war without weapons.”

⁸ St. John Vestry Minutes, 1649-1699, 114, 13 May 1692, Shilstone Library, Barbados Museum and Historical Society, Barbados, hereafter BMHS. From the vestry’s resolution to find a house for the minister closer to the parish church. While all available evidence points to a great preference for marriage at home

minister who presided at a wedding in a Charles Town drawing room or in a Barbadian great house was a guest in another's space, the inconvenience of his going there reminding all just "who was working for whom."⁹

This preference for marriages at home seems constant across the decades in the plantation colonies, even though it usually cost the marrying parties more than a church wedding. An early eighteenth-century resident of Barbados told his readers that "as most Countries have some particular Customs to themselves so hath this," including the practice of "their marriages, which is always solemnized in their houses (never in the Churches)."¹⁰ This was true even though a 1705 act required Barbadians to pay only 5 shillings for a church wedding and 20 shillings for a wedding anywhere else.¹¹ Perhaps the domestic setting lent itself to convincing the minister to perform the marriage at the couple's pleasure, "never minding Canonically hours day or night will doe."¹² Domestic marriage was still the rule in 1734, when legislation concerning clandestine marriages affirmed that "it has been customary and usual here to marry in Private-Houses, and not in Churches" and set a £25 fine for any householder who permitted a clandestine wedding to take place "in his or her House, or in any Backside, Yard, Garden, or other place."¹³

in the period, it should be noted that few parish registers recorded the location of marriages with any regularity.

⁹David Cressy, *Birth, Marriage, and Baptism: Ritual, Religion, and the Life-Cycle in Tudor and Stuart England* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 190.

¹⁰"T. Walduck's Letters from Barbados," *Journal of the Barbados Museum and Historical Society* 15, no. 1 (1947), 43-44.

¹¹"An Act for the Better Encouragement of the Clergy," in Hall, ed., *Acts, Passed in the Island of Barbados*, 161-162. While the 5 shilling fee for a church wedding was unchanged in 1764, the fee for other places had risen to £1, strongly suggesting that few persons were being married in church. See Richard Hall, ed., *An Abridgement of the Acts in Force in the Island of Barbados* (London, 1764), 25. This is bound with Hall's *Act's* in the copy at the Barbados Archives in Black Rock, hereafter BA.

¹²"T. Walduck's Letters from Barbados," *Journal of the Barbados Museum and Historical Society* 15, no. 1 (1947), 43-44. The Canons of 1604 permitted marriage "between the hours of eight and twelve in the forenoon." See Cardwell, ed., *Synodalia*, 282. Canon 62.

¹³"An Act for Preventing Clandestine Marriages," in Hall, ed., *Acts, Passed in the Island of Barbados*, 299-300. Clandestine marriages were those solemnized without due notification of parents and members of

One rector of Vere in Jamaica alienated his parishioners by “refusing to christen and marry in private houses,” though they found the governor could hardly demand the minister desist from following the rubrics and canons of the church.¹⁴ A Jamaican clergyman in 1808 regretted that by “a long established usage funerals, Christenings, & Marriages are attended here at the house of the parties; which renders these a very harassing part of the duty.”¹⁵ Most Carolina weddings were celebrated in the manner of John and Elizabeth Basnett, who were “married ye 28 day of Nov.br 1725 Att Mr. John Exhaus in Golden Lane.”¹⁶ There was no constant tradition of holding weddings in the bride’s home. Carolinians Thomas Elliot, Jr. and Mary Bellinger, for instance, were married “at his Father’s house at Long Point five Miles from Town.”¹⁷ Of the 115 marriages solemnized in the period 1758 to 1774 in St. James’ on the Santee, 95 were in private homes, eighteen were in the rector’s home, five were in the church, and one was in the schoolhouse.¹⁸ Thus the rite that created a new domestic arrangement was, perhaps fittingly, usually celebrated in a domestic space.

There is sadly little detail on the location of the rituals that united the descendants of Africans, free and enslaved, who were married by ministers of the established church during slavery, especially in the eighteenth century. It seems unlikely, however, that ministers condescended to travel to the homes of free persons of color, requiring them

the community, either by omitting the publication of banns, obtaining a fraudulent license, or simply convincing a clergyman to conduct the service without either.

¹⁴ Fulham Papers, 18:228-233. Account of “The State of the Church in Jamaica,” circa 1722.

¹⁵ Fulham Papers, 18:151-152. Alexander Campbell of Kingston, 23 April 1808.

¹⁶ No author, “Historical Notes,” *South Carolina Historical and Genealogical Magazine* 26, no. 3 (1925), 173. This from “Records of the Burden Family,” noted in their Bible and printed in that section of the journal.

¹⁷ Mabel L. Webber, ed., “Journal of Robert Pringle, 1746-1747,” *South Carolina Historical and Genealogical Magazine* 26, no. 2 (1925), 101.

¹⁸ See the parish register edited by Mabel L. Webber and printed in Anne Baker Leland Bridges and Roy Williams III, *St. James Santee Plantation Parish: History and Records, 1685-1925* (Spartanburg, SC: Reprint Company, 1997), 351-380. This register is one of few church records that consistently noted the location of weddings and thus permits meaningful counting.

instead to come to the church or rectory. No location was noted in the register of St. Michael's Bridgetown in 1695 when "Peter Simpson & Margaret Dolly, free negroes" were married. It is suggestive that Mary Jones, a free negro woman, was baptized and then married Charles Cuffee, also a free man, on June 25, 1694, perhaps using the church's font and then moving to the chancel step for the wedding service.¹⁹ Edward Reading, a Jamaican minister exceptional in his interest in ministering to plantation slaves in the 1720s, "publicly Married" some recently baptized slaves "in the Church," intending to baptize their children before long.²⁰ In the 1830s, the first slaves married at St. John's in Barbados were married in the church, the preferred location later shifting to the parson's home and then back to the church.²¹ In earlier periods as well, public nuptials were likely the standard for persons of African descent seeking Christian marriage.

Besides choosing a location, those marrying also had discretion as to whether they would take out a license from the governor or have the banns of marriage announced in church on three successive Sundays, another decision that could make their nuptials more private or more public. Though banns were not at all unheard of, there was a general preference for licenses over the decades, more so in certain times and places than

¹⁹ St. Michael's Parish Register, 1648-1702, 483-484, BA.

²⁰ Fulham Papers, 17:159-160. Edward Reading to Mr. Dean, 13 February 1723. This letter is not calendared in the highly useful guide William Wilson Manross, *The Fulham Papers in the Lambeth Palace Library: American Colonial Section, Calendar and Indexes* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1965).

²¹ St. John's Parish Register, Marriages, 1657-1848, BA. The very late eighteenth century may have seen a shift back toward weddings in church in Barbados, perhaps as much for whites as for persons of color. See St. Philip's Parish Register, Marriages, 1672-1848, 54, ca. 1778, BA. Here the clerk temporarily recorded the location of a dozen weddings, ten of which were in the church. The records for this parish in the 1820s reveal a majority of weddings in the church, then in the rectory, and then in the church by the end of the 1830s. It is inadvisable to generalize on this limited evidence, however.

others.²² In South Carolina, custom allowed the minister a fee of 15 shillings for a marriage with banns and £1..10 for one by license.²³ Yet most couples in St. James' Santee used a license, some 97 out of 115 in the period 1758-1774.²⁴ Very few persons chose banns in St. Philip's parish in Charles Town in the same period.²⁵ Walduck reported from Barbados that he "never know but one pair asked in ye Churches yet but they all take out licenses Signed by ye Governor he being Ordinary."²⁶ St. James' parish in Barbados was one of a few that noted the means of marriage with some consistency, with licenses being far more popular in the seventeenth century.²⁷ Even persons of the most limited means there preferred a license. William Thomas and Ann Jones were married at St. James' via license, even though "she marry'd without cloathes," as a parish official strangely noted.²⁸ At Christ Church parish in Barbados, marriage by license was far more popular for whites except for a period between 1781 and 1785, when avaricious Governor James Cunninghame "laid an exorbitant fee on marriage licenses," to which brides responded by "preferring to be 'asked in church,'" rather than inducing asking their future husbands to pay.²⁹ Banns announced to the assembled parish

²² A general analysis of the frequency of marriage by banns or license is not possible, since many parish registers only inconsistently took note of either that choice or the location of the nuptials. In England after the Restoration, "virtually all the middling sort and above were married by license, but the cost put it out of reach of the lower classes." Stone, *Uncertain Unions*, 22. For an earlier period, see Cressy, *Birth, Marriage, and Baptism*, 305-310.

²³ Fulham Papers, 10:153-154. Notes attributed to Charles Martyn, 11 April 1762.

²⁴ St. James' Santee Parish Register in Bridges and Williams, *St. James Santee Plantation Parish*, 351-380.

²⁵ See D.E. Huger Smith and A.S. Salley, Jr, eds., *Register of St. Philip's Parish, Charles Town, or Charleston, S.C., 1754-1810* (Columbia, University of South Carolina Press, 1971).

²⁶ T. Walducks Letters from Barbados," *Journal of the Barbados Museum and Historical Society* 15, no. 1 (1947), 43.

²⁷ See St. James' Parish Register, 1693-1825, BA.

²⁸ St. James' Parish Register, 1693-1825, 8, 3 March 1696. BA.

²⁹ Christ Church Parish Register, Marriages, 1643-1848, BA. At St. John's in Barbados, the clerk only noted banns or license in 1790, in which six of seven marriages were by license. The quotation on brides' response to the higher license fee is found in J.W. Orderson, *Creoleana: or Social and Domestic Scene and Incidents in Barbados in Days of Yore* (London: Saunders and Otley, 1842; repr. Oxford: Macmillan Education, 2002), 29-30. In the preface to this novel, Orderson insists that "his materials are all (with the

community the intention of the affianced to be married, in ways that stimulated local gossip, provoked bawdy talk, or created resistance that couples preferred to avoid. One minister ordered his backcountry Carolina congregation that “when Banns are published,” they were not to “make it a Matter of Sport.”³⁰ Persons who had been cohabitating for some time in Carolina avoided banns for the public shame they might bring on.³¹ When persons sought a quick, quiet, or potentially scandalous marriage, licenses were definitely more discrete and offered greater flexibility.³² Securing a license made the process of marrying less public, though still fully recorded by public authorities.

Marriage by banns was also associated with lower status persons in the plantation colonies. It is likely that free persons of color often chose banns because of their lower cost. When Edward Wisehammer and Jane Green, free persons of color, were married in St. Andrew’s parish in Jamaica in 1741, they chose banns, which the clerk noted as though it were an exception.³³ The marriage of free persons named David Sarjeant and Sarah Cuffley by banns in 1764 was the only marriage not by license in St. Philip’s parish in Barbados that year.³⁴ Ten of the fourteen marriages contracted across racial

exception of one incident) drawn from facts, which are as closely adhered to as the nature of the subject would admit” (20).

³⁰ Richard J. Hooker, ed., *The Carolina Backcountry on the Eve of Revolution: The Journal and Other Writings of Charles Woodmason, Anglican Itinerant* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1953), 89.

³¹ See Frank. J. Klingberg, ed., *The Carolina Chronicle of Dr. Francis Le Jau, 1706-1717* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1956), 175. To the Secretary, 19 March 1716.

³² See Klingberg, ed., *Carolina Chronicle of Dr. Francis La Jau*, 150-152. To the Secretary, 12 March 1715, for complaints about three marriage solemnized by other clergy by license in Le Jau’s parish. The matches were of a man to his brother’s widow (not permitted by the Church of England), of a young man and a fourteen year old orphan girl whose guardian did not approve, and a local woman to a young man already married to a woman in Barbados.

³³ St. Andrew’s Parish Register, Marriages, 1666-1806, 31, 16 January 1741, BA.

³⁴ St. Philip’s Parish Register, Marriages, 1672-1848, 46, 29 August 1764. BA.

lines in St. Elizabeth's parish in Jamaica between 1780 and 1815 were by banns.³⁵ But prosperous or status-seeking free persons might marry via license, as did Richard Blackman and Jone Siston at St. James' Barbados in 1696.³⁶ When large numbers of slaves and then newly free people were married in Barbados in the 1830s, it was by banns. Though marriage with banns seems to have been cheaper most of the time, most white couples and some persons of color took the more expensive and seemingly more refined route of securing a license. Persons with fewer resources were thus pushed toward more public and thus less prestigious rites.³⁷

Yet persons of color may well have realized that their best interests were served when their nuptials were celebrated in the most public fashion, even if that fashion was less prestigious by the standards of some whites. Marrying in the parish church after the triple announcement of the pending marriage rendered a marital union as public as possible. The public nature of such a union meant that a new husband and wife had recourse to social memory and communal authority if the legitimacy of their union and offspring were threatened. While more private rites might be only recoverable in constantly decomposing and ill-kept parish records, public rites persisted in the memories of the parish community. Major issues such as freedom, legitimacy, and the disposition of property were at stake when free people of color married. Knowing that the cards were stacked against them and the frequency with which white men forcibly sexually

³⁵ Brathwaite, *Development of Creole Society in Jamaica*, 188-189.

³⁶ St. James' Parish Register, 1693-1825, 11, 28 November 1696, BA.

³⁷ J.W. Orderson of Barbados recorded the (perhaps apocryphal) story of a minister publishing the banns of marriage between a young widow and suitor who had been courting in church, neither of whom had requested such publication and both of whom were embarrassed by it. When they angrily questioned him about it, he replied that if they did not "like to wait for three publications," they should "procure the license...and then the whole matter may be settled as soon as to-morrow." See Orderson, *Creoleana*, 149-150.

transgressed supposed racial lines, the publishing of banns and more public rites could be deeply meaningful and highly useful for free persons of color.

Many whites and likely persons of color turned to feasting and conviviality as soon as the ritual was accomplished. In Barbados around 1710, “if the Parties be of any family there is all the Entertainment the country can afford.” Even poverty would not prevent a party, since

“if they are poor 3 or 4 of their Neighbors will join for they resol’d to be merry once in their lives for a Barbique sport and some find Sugar some Rum (cum multis alis) untill they make up a feast with a Fiddler to be sure. After dinner the parson takes a Bermudas Gigg & Dances Cheger foot with M’dam. Bride all hands gett Drunk, and ye Vinculated couple go to bed in the fear of the Lord.”³⁸

Sixty years later on the same island, a recent arrival from England married into an old planter family and later remembered that the day was marked by an assembly of “the several branches of Mr. Wood’s [his father-in-law] numerous and extensive family...at his house called Harmony Hall.”³⁹ A Jamaican clergyman in Vere parish reported that after age seventeen, the young people of the parish attended every wedding “where there is always fiddlers & Country dancing.”⁴⁰ In 1751, South Carolinians read in their newspaper a reprinted article from the *Jamaican Courant* that described some island nuptials, “which were very magnificent.”⁴¹ “Music instruments of joy” accompanied the wedding festivities of an older couple in the Carolina low country in 1743.⁴² A Charles Town “widow lady of a good fortune” remarried in 1732, giving “a handsome

³⁸ T. Walduck’s Letters from Barbados,” *Journal of the Barbados Museum and Historical Society* 15, no. 1 (1947), 44.

³⁹ “The Autobiographical Manuscript of William Senhouse,” *Journal of the Barbados Museum and Historical Society* 2, no. 3 (1935): 120.

⁴⁰ Fulham Papers, 17:185-188. James White to Bishop Gibson, 23 April 1724.

⁴¹ *South Carolina Gazette*, 15 July 1751.

⁴² A.S. Salley, Jr., comp., *Marriage Notices in the South Carolina Gazette and its Successors (1732-1801)* (Albany, NY: Joel Munsell’s Sons, 1902), 9. 5 September 1743, the wedding of Elizabeth Street and John Goodwin.

entertainment...to some of their particular friends...with abundance of agreeable mirth.”⁴³ Likewise a Beaufort groom “gave an elegant Entertainment, to which those of first Consequence were invited” in 1768.⁴⁴ In a manner more or less modest, weddings were marked with displays of domestic hospitality, including food, drink, and dancing in modes that connected these colonial nuptials to English matrimonial customs.⁴⁵

Some married couples emerged slowly from the cocoon of family that gathered around them for the marriage liturgy. At William Senhouse’s wedding in Barbados, a second and more public day of feasting followed the marriage, as the governor and his wife and other island elites joined the family “and composed a numerous happy and respectable company.”⁴⁶ Indeed, the “gaiety of our friends was happily and spiritedly kept up from some days,” until the “the 2nd Sunday after the marriage [when] the Bride and Bridegroom made their appearance in due form at St. Michael’s Church,” a moment which manifested them as husband and wife to the parish community.⁴⁷ While elite residents of the plantation colonies wanted the control of marriage and the marriage liturgy that licenses and domestic liturgies engendered, they also understood the importance of the public manifestations of the new marriage. Banns, licenses, and such formal appearances in public signaled the new legal, social, and economic reality of marriage. Though the desire to marry in semi-privacy was intense, and indeed elites

⁴³ Salley, comp., *Marriage Notices in the South Carolina Gazette and its Successors (1732-1801)*, 5. 29 April 1732.

⁴⁴ A.S. Salley, Jr., comp., *Marriage Notices in the South-Carolina Gazette and Country Journal (1765-1775) and in The Charlestown Gazette (1778-1780)* (Charleston, South Carolina: Walker, Evans, and Cogswell, 1904), 11. The wedding of Nicholas Slidell and Polly Hyeth, 10 May 1768.

⁴⁵ See Cressy, *Birth, Marriage, and Baptism*, 350-374.

⁴⁶ “The Autobiographical Manuscript of William Senhouse,” *Journal of the Barbados Museum and Historical Society* 2, no. 3 (1935): 120.

⁴⁷ “The Autobiographical Manuscript of William Senhouse,” *Journal of the Barbados Museum and Historical Society* 2, no. 3 (1935): 120.

could afford that privacy, some public moments could not be omitted if marriage was to have its intended social effects.

That manifestation to the wider community signaled that the husband and wife were now full members of the community of responsible white adults and individually of the gendered arenas that men and women inhabited. Though the ritual took place in a private setting, its importance to public life was paramount. For the propertied white elite of the plantation colonies, the transition from the single to married state could provoke anxiety among relations and other members of the community, for much more than love was at stake. A Barbadian clergyman “omitted going to joyn a Couple when sent for to their house two days before ye Election, the Match being patch’d up by Male-Contents to make a freeholder to vote against the Governours interest.”⁴⁸ That clerical probity was not found in South Carolina’s Brian Hunt. He colluded in the marriage of a minor heiress of considerable means to a man her guardians would not approve. He avoided the inference of the guardians by publishing their banns in a near empty church at holy day services, setting off a firestorm of accusations from the province’s political and religious leaders.⁴⁹ This was to be expected in a society that recorded marriages in its newspaper largely in terms of the economic repercussions of the match, as when Stephen Bedon married Ruth Nickolls, “an agreeable young Lady, with a large Fortune,” or when John Gibbes married Elizabeth Jenys, who had “a very large Fortune.”⁵⁰

⁴⁸ Fulham Papers, 15:292-293. Arthur Holt to Bishop Gibson, 17 November 1730.

⁴⁹ See Annette Laing, “‘A Very Immoral and Offensive Man’: Religious Culture, Gentility, and the Strange Case of Brian Hunt, 1727,” *South Carolina Historical Magazine* 103, no. 1 (2002): 6-29. See various letters on the matter in Fulham Papers, 9:206-213, 216-217.

⁵⁰ *South Carolina Gazette*, 15 August 1743. See Trevor Burnard, “Inheritance and Independence: Women’s Status in Early Colonial Jamaica,” *William and Mary Quarterly*, 3rd Ser., 48 (1991): 93-114.

When clandestine marriages occurred, young women and men could quickly have access to property that their relations and other members of the community were not ready for them to have.⁵¹ By controlling access to the marriage liturgy and insisting that its public manifestation in the publishing of banns or the granting of a license not be omitted, political and social elites in the plantation colonies minimized the disorder that hasty marriages could engender. By 1682, Jamaica law threatened ministers with a £100 fine for marrying any parishioners without thrice-published banns.⁵² Barbadian legislators complained that “divers Marriages have been clandestinely consummated in this island, without the knowledge, consent, or approbation of Parents and other Relations, and often to the utter ruin of the Persons thereby running themselves into unsuitable matches.”⁵³ Their act provided that any minister who performed a wedding without banns or license was to be fined £100 and jailed for six months, other penalties being provided for parish sextons or clerks who assisted and for persons who provided their homes for such illicit nuptials.⁵⁴ Some brides and grooms used false surnames and claimed residence in other parishes in order to avoid the meddling of their elders.⁵⁵ Ministers in Barbados were later forbidden to marry any persons unknown to them if “not in the presence of their Parents, Guardians, or Friends,” even with banns or license.⁵⁶ One rector of Port Royal in Jamaica married a couple without banns or license and found himself “Oblig’d to Pay the Penalty of one hundred Pounds,” and still some members of the Council asked the commissary to

⁵¹ On clandestine marriage in England, see Stone, *Uncertain Unions*, 22-30 and Cressy, *Birth, Marriage, and Death*, 316-335.

⁵² Trott, *Laws*, 413. “An Act for the Maintenance of Ministers, and the Poor, and Erecting and Repairing of Churches.” ca. 1682. See Long, *History of Jamaica*, 2:237-238, for a general discussion of the Jamaican law of marriage.

⁵³ Hall, ed. *Acts*, 299-300. “An Act for Preventing Clandestine Marriages,” 1734.

⁵⁴ Hall, ed. *Acts*, 299-300. “An Act for Preventing Clandestine Marriages,” 1734.

⁵⁵ Hall, ed., *Acts*, 320-321. “An Additional Act for Preventing Clandestine Marriages,” 1739.

⁵⁶ Hall, ed., *Acts*, 320-321. “An Additional Act for Preventing Clandestine Marriages,” 1739.

prosecute him as a matter of clerical discipline as well.⁵⁷ In Carolina, “great care [was] always taken to prevent such irregular marriages,” the clergy being cautioned to marry only their own parishioners by license and to keep the commissary informed of their actions.⁵⁸ The dangers of these excessively private weddings were keenly felt by the older generations that made law and directed the parish affairs of the plantation colonies. Their control of the rite was essential to the orderly transmission of wealth and property.

Some ministers were indeed willing to collude in circumventing that control and in ways that brought them into conflict with one another. Not infrequent were the disputes between clergy over the crossing of parish lines for the performance of both weddings and baptisms, the latter of which will be treated in the second half of this article. One rector of St. Michael’s in Bridgetown complained that fellow minister Thomas Warren was supporting himself “by marrying, christening, etc clandestinely; particularly in my parish & by adhering to that Party, that despise government & speak evil of Dignitaries.”⁵⁹ A minister in Bermuda found his parishioners recruiting another minister for weddings, one willing to take “advantage of my determination to marry my parishioners no where but in the church when the Weather will admit of their comeing there.”⁶⁰ Bermudians clearly valued their tradition of marriage at home and were willing to foment conflict between ministers to preserve their practice. In Jamaica, the commissary could report to the Bishop of London that he had never received a complaint

⁵⁷ Fulham Papers, 17:272-273. William May to Bishop Gibson, 30 May 1737.

⁵⁸ Fulham Papers, 9:216-217, W.T. Bull to Bishop Gibson, 13 May 1728; 9:67-68. Bishop Robinson’s instructions.

⁵⁹ Fulham Papers, 16:27-28. William Johnson to Bishop Gibson, 17 June 1732.

⁶⁰ Fulham Papers, 17:33. Thomas Lyttleton to Governor La Bruere, 8 October 1771.

from a lay person at his annual review of the clergy but that there was always a dispute to adjudicate between clergy over the crossing of parish boundaries to marry or baptize.⁶¹

The self-consciously respectable white residents of the plantation colonies contrasted the ordered, domestic habits they cultivated in marrying with the practices of Africans and common whites. White Jamaicans thought that their slaves “in their Marriages...have not Form or Ceremony, but take on anothers Words; and I have known some that never Separated...But in general they often change, when any Quarrel arises.”⁶² Edward Long explained that Jamaican slaves were “all married (*in their way*) to a husband, or wife, *pro tempore*” and that their “notions of love are, that it is free and transitory.”⁶³ South Carolina Baptists excommunicated “Madam Bakers Will for unlawfully Seeking after another wife, while his Lawfull one was yet Living.”⁶⁴ Yet Charles Woodmason described similar conjugal behavior among white residents of the Carolina backcountry in his patronizing tones. In Jamaica, one observer was sure that “the rude and common people seldom marie, according to the Ceremony of ye Church, but are so full of faith as to take one another’s words, and soo live together, and beget children, and if they fall out, or disagree, they part friendly by consent.”⁶⁵ Commenting on such flexible arrangement, those who sought to make up the governing classes of the plantation colonies turned their social inferiors into useful foils.

⁶¹ Fulham Papers, 17:53-54. William May to Bishop Sherlock, 21 July 1751.

⁶² James Knight, *History of Jamaica c. 1743*, 29, Reproduction of British Library Add. MS 12418, 12419, West Indies Collection, University of the West Indies, Mona, Jamaica.

⁶³ Edward Long, *The History of Jamaica* (London: 1774; repr., New York: Arno Press, 1972), 2:414-415. Emphasis in original.

⁶⁴ Ashley River Baptist Church, Records, 1736-1769, 10 September 1739, Baptist Historical Collection, Furman University.

⁶⁵ John Taylor, *Multum in Parvo or Taylor’s Historie of his Life and Travells in America*, 504. Manuscript, National Library of Jamaica.

III. Baptismal Ways

Europeans in the plantation colonies responded to the birth of their children with much the same ritual attention that marked the birth of children in their cultures of origin.⁶⁶ Midwives, neighboring women, and female relatives attended the birth. Mothers spent some time after the birth in seclusion and rest. In some places, they went to church for their churching some time after their delivery, marking their return to the society of the world generally and their husbands in particular. Yet the ritual most charged with social import after the arrival of a child was baptism. The basic rite of Christian initiation was also an opportunity to name a child, to choose godparents to create or sustain fictive kinship networks, and to celebrate a couple's fecundity with feasting, dancing, and traditional bawdy talk. While the dearth of diarists in the plantation colonies means that we will never recover a full sense of the cultural meaning of baptism in those places, the scattered references that can be recovered reveal a rite whose meaning only grew in importance when transferred from the metropole to these slave societies. Operating in a dialectic between "communal ceremony" and "family matter," baptism was a central location for the creation of American systems of race.⁶⁷

Like marriage, baptism was important to Europeans in the plantation colonies. Anglican parents in Carolina were serious about ensuring that their children were baptized, resorting to dissenting ministers when their own clergy were not available,

⁶⁶ On baptism in early modern Europe, see Edward Muir, *Ritual in Early Modern Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 20-27.

⁶⁷ Will Coster, *Baptism and Spiritual Kinship in Early Modern England* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2002), 74.

though pleading that “they themselves were brought up” in “the Orthodox faith.”⁶⁸ The death of a minister left parishioners in the regrettable position of being “destitute of a Minister, to baptize our Children or bury our dead,” two essential ritual moments in the colonial mind.⁶⁹ When South Carolina clergyman William Guy visited the Bahamas in 1731, it was in response to “their great Necessity, specially in Christening their Children.” Indeed, he baptized “upwards of 130 children” during his brief visit.⁷⁰ Soon after Charles Woodmason arrived in the Cheraws in the Carolina backcountry, he met a congregation of 500 who presented him some 60 children to baptize, a process of “standing and speaking 6 Hours together” that left him “almost tir’d in baptizing of Children.”⁷¹ In the single year of 1767, he baptized 782 persons in Carolina, well more than two per day.⁷² In eleven years of service in the mid eighteenth century, a Bermuda minister baptized “near a Thousand Children, Whites and Blacks.”⁷³ Persons not baptized as children sought the rite out as adults. A Barbadian minister of the 1720s reported he “had several Occasions of administering Baptism to Adult Persons both in health, & upon a bed of sickness, some of considerable distinction.” He also baptized “a great many children from one to ten years old & upwards.”⁷⁴ Persons desired baptism for all sorts of reasons; one minister complained that the irreligious wanted it “principally, to become entitled to Christian burial.”⁷⁵ Perhaps succumbing to the comforts of a national rite of

⁶⁸ Fulham Papers, 9:108-109. John Barnwell of Beaufort to Governor Nicholson, 16 March 1723.

⁶⁹ Fulham Papers, 10:138. Churchwardens and Vestry of Prince Frederick Parish to Bishop Sherlock, 23 October 1751.

⁷⁰ Fulham Papers, 15:74-75. Alexander Garden to Bishop Gibson, 24 July 1731.

⁷¹ Hooker, ed., *Carolina Backcountry*, 13. Journal entry of 25 January 1767. On others occasions, he baptized 27 and 60 children at one time, See Hooker, *Carolina Backcountry*, 17, 22.

⁷² Hooker, *Carolina Backcountry*, 25.

⁷³ Fulham Papers, 17:27-28. Alexander Richardson to Bishop Terrick, 23 June 1766.

⁷⁴ Fulham Papers, 15:237-238. Arthur Holt to Bishop Gibson, 5 April 1726.

⁷⁵ William Duke, *A Course of Plain and Familiar Lectures, on the Christian Covenant, on the Articles of the Christian Faith, and on the Two Sacraments, Baptism and the Lord's Supper, Chiefly Delivered in the*

passage, even Quakers in Jamaica's St. Elizabeth's parish permitted their children to be "christen'd by the Minrs of the Church of England."⁷⁶ Clearly baptism was powerful moment for new parents in the plantation colonies, a pious act that also connected their children to the ritual life of the mother country.

In Carolina, however, baptism was also an issue worth fighting about. The colony's high-church attorney general in 1703 complained of being "very Much infested, with the Sect of Anabaptists" and requested a reprint from Fox's Book of Martyrs to convince persons "wavering, as to that point of Infant Baptism."⁷⁷ The Anglican minister Francis Le Jau did theological battle with persons contending for immersion baptism in Goose Creek, claiming to silence them by announcing his willingness to "baptize by dipping when desired."⁷⁸ Other Anglican clergy noted occasions on which they dipped catechumens, as when Elizabeth Ladson was "bapt per Dipping" in June 1736 at St. Andrew's parish in Carolina.⁷⁹ Le Jau's argument with "a peevish disputing" Baptist failed to convince that disputant but did drive a stander-by to request baptism, which Le Jau dramatically administered on the spot.⁸⁰ Welsh Neck Baptists threatened that any

Parish Church of St. Thomas, in the Island of Barbados (Gloucester, England: R. Raikes for J.F. and C. Rivington, 1790), 83. The author, a rector of St. Thomas' parish in Barbados, attributed this sentiment to "many ignorant Christians."

⁷⁶ Fulham Papers, 18:228-233. Account of "The State of the Church in Jamaica," ca. 1722. On the importance of baptism in early New England, see David Hall and Ann Brown, "Family Strategies and Religious Practice: Baptism and the Lord's Supper in Early New England," in *Lived Religion in America: Toward a History of Practice*, ed. David D. Hall, 41-68 (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997). Readers of colonial newspapers could follow the ritual lives of English royalty from afar. The *South Carolina Gazette* for 1 December 1737 covered in detail the lavish baptism of the Princess Augusta, a royal granddaughter, noting that the font and flagons were brought from the Tower. The 4 August 1739 edition corrected mistakes in the report of the baptism of Prince Edward Augustus. Both articles listed godparents and noted the lateness of the hour, at 8:00 and 9:00 in the evening respectively.

⁷⁷ Fulham Papers, 9:1-2. Nicholas Trott to Archbishop Tenison, 17 February 1703.

⁷⁸ Klingberg, ed., *Carolina Chronicle of Dr. Francis Le Jau*, 58. To the Secretary of the S.P.G., 5 August 1709.

⁷⁹ St. Andrew's Parish Register, 1709-1856, 34, 22 June 1736, transcript, South Carolina Division of Archives and History, Columbia, South Carolina, hereafter SCDAH. See the same source for the baptism of Elizabeth Butler, "(Per Dipping)", 40, 29 February 1743.

⁸⁰ Klingberg, ed., *Carolina Chronicle of Dr. Francis Le Jau*, 98-99. 5 September 1711.

who “apostatize from the Truth in which they have been educated by getting themselves sprinkled...shall be debarred from our communion.”⁸¹ Anglican parents of a more reformed frame of mind sought to have clergy omit making the sign of the cross on their children’s foreheads at baptism, continuing a long tradition of objecting to that moment in the Anglican form of the ritual.⁸² Carolina Quakers joined them, posting “virulent Libel[s]” that denounced the sign of the cross.⁸³ Their opposition provoked Anglican clergy in Carolina and elsewhere to celebrate the slow triumph over Quakerism that the baptism of each former member of that group signaled.⁸⁴ Amid the greater religious diversity that separated Carolina from the experience of the West Indies, baptism could be an issue of great contention within the European community.⁸⁵

Like the marriage rite that opened the way to licit reproduction, the baptism of whites usually took place in the domestic realm of the home, especially in the island colonies. That location worked against the theological content of the prayer book liturgy, strongly suggesting that the baptism of infants was more a ceremony of naming and welcoming into a particular family than one of initiation into the Christian mysteries. Walduck of Barbados explained that while marriage might be “done on a sudden & to serve occasion,” baptism was done “with Deliberation and provision, and always in their

⁸¹ Records of the Welsh Neck Baptist Church, 1737-1935, 9, 4 April 1761. South Caroliniana Library, Columbia, South Carolina, hereafter SCL. They were surprisingly less demanding of former paedobaptists, admitting them to eucharistic fellowship without adult immersion baptism “upon their signing such a covenant as shall be thought proper by the Church.”

⁸² Frank. J. Klingberg, ed., *Carolina Chronicle: The Papers of Commissary Gideon Johnston, 1707-1716* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1946), 28. Johnston to the Bishop of Salisbury, 20 September 1708. On the English controversy over the sign of the cross, see Cressy, *Birth, Marriage, and Death*, 124-138.

⁸³ Hooker, *Carolina Backcountry*, 46. 1768.

⁸⁴ Klingberg, ed., *Carolina Chronicle of Dr. Francis Le Jau*, 37. Here Le Jau celebrates his baptism of “several Quakers,” in a letter to the Secretary of the S.P.G., 13 March 1708.

⁸⁵ Perhaps challenged by some, William Duke apparently justified the use of the sign of the cross to his congregation in Barbados. See William Duke, *A Course of Plain and Familiar Lectures*, 70-71.

houses, never in the Churches.”⁸⁶ The minister in St. James’ on that island around the year 1700 found it convenient to baptize several persons at “my house” and also baptized at “Judge Rooks,” “at Coll. Farmers,” and “at Robt Hill’s House.”⁸⁷ Jamaicans insisted on baptism at home, withholding baptismal fees if the minister obliged them to come to church.⁸⁸ In Carolina, the fees for “Christnings in private houses” depended “on the Benevolence of the People whose Generosity is very diffusive.”⁸⁹ Baptism at home meant that a still-secluded mother might be able to participate, joined by the women who assisted at her delivery. Abigail Martindale, the sister or sister-in-law of Bridgetown shipwright William Martindale, could well remember that she was “present at ye Birth and Baptism” of John Waters Martindale when his baptismal records went missing some 35 year after the event.⁹⁰ Baptism at home underlined the social meaning of the rite that predominated in the minds of many parents.

As with marriage, conviviality accompanied the baptism of infants and seems to have been integral to many persons’ understanding of the rite.⁹¹ A nice meal went well with the sacrament of Christian initiation, as when Joseph Senhouse of Barbados “dined at Carrington Valley & stood sponsor with Genl. and Mrs. Frere for Mr. Carrington’s son

⁸⁶ “T. Walduck’s Letters from Barbados,” *Journal of the Barbados Museum and Historical Society* 15, no. 1 (1947), 44. This is an overstatement.

⁸⁷ St. James’ Parish Register, Baptisms, 1693-1825, BA. Baptisms noted at “my house” occurred on 17 September 1699, 1 October 1699, 15 October 1699 (an infant and an adult), 9 January 1700, and 1 December 1700. The three locations given are at 19 September 1699, 1 April 1699, and 28 April 1711. The locations of baptisms, like funerals, were not often noted in parish registers.

⁸⁸ Fulham Papers, 17:185-188. James White to Bishop Gibson, 23 April 1724.

⁸⁹ Fulham Papers, 10:153-154. Notes attributed to Charles Martyn, 11 April 1762.

⁹⁰ St. Michael’s Parish Register, 1771-1794, 347, 1 July 1783, BA. See the reminder from one Barbadian minister of the better practice, in his mind, of baptizing in church; “no other place is so proper for the purpose as the church,” in Duke, *A Course of Plain and Familiar Lectures*, 2.

⁹¹ On baptismal parties in England, see Felicity Heal, *Hospitality in Early Modern England* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990), 80-81, 367-368.

Paul.”⁹² Some Barbadian parents postponed the baptism of children “till they have several Children to be Baptized together...[so] that they may avoid the expence of so many different feasts.”⁹³ Barbadians thought that baptism was best administered in times of “greater plenty & vareity,” often waiting until the “the good time comes, and the hog is fat.”⁹⁴ When those good times arose, there would be a “Corne Shote & Boviness, a Calipie of Sea Tortoise, a Stude Cofum, and rosted Caberetta & other things baked & barbiqued, with planting, tarts, & yam puddings...Chegeis Grapes, fat porks, sower soppes and the guavas.” These “merry times” also called for abundant drink, including “strong Cowjou, sparkling mobby, Humming pareno, and to crown the feast a lusty bowl of rum punch.”⁹⁵ Indeed, it was only at “weddings, christenings and birthdays” that some Barbadians might serve wine, otherwise being content with local spirits like falernum, bub, and black-strap.⁹⁶ Sometimes guests at baptismal feasts enjoyed these offerings too much. In the mid 1680s, the governor of Barbados investigated accusations that Sir Timothy Thornhill made a blasphemous speech “at a certaine Christening,” which turned up witnesses who could not agree on what exactly Thornhill had said. Those discrepancies led the governor “to apprehend all the Company soe farr gone in drink that none of them could well remember what was sayd.” One of the party alleged to metropolitan authorities that Thornhill had wished “himselfe to be the Lord God that he

⁹² James V. Brandow, ed., “The Diary of Joseph Senhouse,” *Journal of the Barbados Museum and Historical Society* 37, no. 4 (1986), 381. Entry of 15 January 1777.

⁹³ Fulham Papers, 15:215-216. Arthur Holt of Barbados to Bishop Gibson, 30 April 1725.

⁹⁴ “T. Walduck’s Letters from Barbados,” *Journal of the Barbados Museum and Historical Society* 15, no. 1 (1947), 44.

⁹⁵ “T. Walduck’s Letters from Barbados,” *Journal of the Barbados Museum and Historical Society* 15, no. 1 (1947), 44.

⁹⁶ Orderson, *Creoleana*, 25. The wife of an early nineteenth-century governor of Jamaica served wine and cake after the baptisms of both slaves and her own children. See Philip Wright, ed., *Lady Nugent’s Journal of Her Residence in Jamaica from 1801 to 1805* (Kingston: Institute of Jamaica, 1966), 38, 126.

might damn all those that would not be drunk with him.”⁹⁷ Plain people like Barbados Quakers disliked such baptismal events, criticizing the “great feasting of late, with fiddling and dancing at the heathenish custom of sprinkling the child.”⁹⁸ While Thornhill’s behavior was clearly beyond the pale, baptisms were events that gathered communities together for traditional hospitality and were a part of the social fabric that could be taken for granted.

Christening parties in Tudor and Stuart England called for a modicum of playful sexual banter, at which men were advised to “lard your talk now and then with a little waggery wrapped up in clean linen,” and women talked in a similar vein about their husbands and childbirth and rearing, all of which made them excellent opportunities for the unmatched to evaluate one another.⁹⁹ In Jamaica, young men made a habit of attending the christening parties “around the whole Parish” though uninvited, sometimes dancing until midnight and “learning breeding” in the process.¹⁰⁰ A Jamaican resident who had recently married quite well asked his brother, a priest in England, to come to Jamaica to baptize his first child. His wife was “a good & pious Member of the Church of England” and would keep the child “in its proper confinement till that time,” so that the christening could be an occasion for the wife to introduce the bachelor clergyman to her youngest sister. Sixteen years old, she was “five foot nine Inches high, black hair, bright black eyes...the most beautiful person in the Island.” He promised she would be a fine

⁹⁷ Minutes of the Council, Lucas Transcripts, 211-213, ca. May 1686, Public Library of Barbados, Bridgetown, hereafter PLB.

⁹⁸ P.F. Campbell, *The Church in Barbados in the Seventeenth Century* (Bridgetown: Barbados Museum and Historical Society, 1982), 156.

⁹⁹ See Cressy, *Birth, Marriage, and Death*, 164-172. The quotation is at 171 and comes from Ned Ward, *The London-Spy, Compleat, in Eighteen Parts* (London, 1703), 393-412.

¹⁰⁰ Fulham Papers, 17:185-188. James White to Bishop Gibson, 23 April 1724.

match, “provided this Climate renders you as youthfull as I am.”¹⁰¹ The atmosphere charged with the satisfaction of successful begetting, baptismal festivities were moments in which Europeans could imagine other erotic and marital possibilities.

One could, however, be so dull as to be baptized in church. Churches were invariably furnished with fonts and some persons were baptized in them. One observer overstated the case when he noted that he had “seen founts” in Barbadian churches but “never saw water put in one.”¹⁰² Fonts were nonetheless important symbols, and donors presented them to churches with the flourishes typical of early modern patronage. The inscription on the font at Christ Church in Barbados memorialized the generosity of Thomas Lewis and was at pains to note his armigerous status.¹⁰³ When John Hothersall gave a “Font of Marble” to St. John’s parish in Barbados, the vestry thanked him heartily and ordered it placed to the right of the church’s entrance, cutting off the end of the churchwardens’ pew to make that possible.¹⁰⁴ And use was made of them. Fifteen persons were baptized in St. Michael’s church in Bridgetown in 1715, albeit a small number when compared with the 92 baptized that year in houses.¹⁰⁵ The 1699 baptism of seventeen-year-old Mary Andrews was in St. James’ church in Barbados, as the baptisms

¹⁰¹ Letter from John Wigan to George Wigan, 20 October 1739, Jamaica Archives, Spanish Town, hereafter JA.

¹⁰² “T. Walduck’s Letters from Barbados,” *Journal of the Barbados Museum and Historical Society* 15, no. 1 (1947), 44.

¹⁰³ The inscription reads “Baptiserium hoc Ecclesiae Christi in Insula Barbados honoratissimus Dus. D. Thomas Lewis J. S. Armiger Regis Majestatais Secretionibus Concilyis in praedicta insa D.D.D. a partu Christi. MDCLIV.” See P.A. Farrar, “Christ Church,” *Journal of the Barbados Museum and Historical Society* 2, no. 3 (1935): 143.

¹⁰⁴ St. John’s Parish, Vestry Minutes, 1649-1699, 83, 11 November 1685, BMHS. Other Barbados fonts worth note include that at St. Lucy’s in Barbados, inscribed with the name of Susana Haggatt, its donor in 1747 and that of St. Peter in Speightstown, in marble, a “gift of John Sober, Esq., to the parish of St. Peter, 1767,” See J.E. Reece and C.G. Clark-Hunt, *Barbados Diocesan History* (London: West India Committee, 1925), 101, 98. The font in St. James is inscribed “Dedit Ricardus Walter to the church of St. James Anno 1684.” Vere Langford Oliver, *The Monumental Inscriptions in the Churches and Churchyards of the Island of Barbados, British West Indies* (London: Mitchell, Hughes, and Clark, 1915; repr. San Bernardino, CA: Borgo Press, 1989), 136.

¹⁰⁵ St. Michael’s Parish Register, 1702-1739, 1715, BA.

of many older persons likely were.¹⁰⁶ Baptism of older children and adults in church may signal a recognition that while the domestic setting was fitting for infants, older catechumens could find meaning in the symbolically rich atmosphere of the parish church. Poor whites like Barbara Hayman, “a Parish child,” and an unnamed “child of Irish Margaret’s a poor woman” were also more likely to be baptized in church, as those two children were in Bridgetown in 1712.¹⁰⁷ Without the means or influence to demand that clergy come to their homes, indigent whites were obliged to experience the rite in a more public fashion.

Church baptism seems to have been more frequent in Carolina, though some parents clearly resented it. A Huguenot woman and her husband in Carolina precipitated a nasty conflict between a Franco-Anglican priest of St. Denis’ parish and the rector of St. Philip’s parish when they entreated the former to come into their home in St. Philip’s parish to baptize a child privately.¹⁰⁸ The rector of St. Philip’s complained to the bishop of London that he had just brought his “Parish to tolerable good order and conformity in most things,” particularly the parishioners’ duty “to bring Their Children to Church for publick Baptism,” only to be undermined by the other minister’s actions.¹⁰⁹ This domestic baptism was contrary to “the known constant Practice in my Parish for several years” and might encourage those who “refuse bringing their Children to Church.”¹¹⁰ One

¹⁰⁶ St. James’ Parish Register, Baptisms, 1693-1825, 19, 3 September 1699, BA. In the same parish, in the brief period in which baptismal locations were noted, white infants were baptized in church on 29 March 1700 and 21 January 1711.

¹⁰⁷ St. Michael’s Parish Register, 1702-1739, 98, 26 July 1712; 100, 22 October 1712, BA. See also the baptisms of Elizabeth Brown and Mary Ball, “Poor Children at Church,” and an unnamed “poor Girl at Church,” at 175, 24 April and 25 May 1719.

¹⁰⁸ Fulham Papers, 9:178-179. John LaPierre to Bishop Gibson, 1 January 1726.

¹⁰⁹ George Williams, ed., “Letters to the Bishop of London from the Commissaries in South Carolina,” *South Carolina Historical Magazine* 78, no. 2 (1977):127. Alexander Garden, 24 May 1725.

¹¹⁰ George Williams, ed., “Letters to the Bishop of London from the Commissaries in South Carolina,” *South Carolina Historical Magazine* 78, no. 2 (1977):127-128. Alexander Garden, 24 May 1725.

such person was Charles Burnham, who threatened to have his children baptized by a dissenting minister if the rector of St. Philip's would not allow another priest "to Creason my Children at my hows." The rector had insisted that the children be brought to church, since both were in good health, and it was "but 3 qrs of an hours easy riding to the Church, and the weather very fair."¹¹¹ Baptismal practice may have been different in the country parishes. Certainly Charles Woodmason's backcountry mission involved "going to different Houses to baptize Children."¹¹² Though baptismal locations were not often recorded, it appears that some Carolina clergy had greater success in promoting church baptism for whites.

It is likely that the baptism of free people of color often took place in churches, ministers again being unlikely to condescend to visit them in their homes and perhaps because many were adults. Thus the free couple Joseph and Anne Force were baptized "at a house set apart for the Service and Worship of God" on Harbour Island in the Bahamas in 1727.¹¹³ When Jamaican Christopher Wade brought his three teenage mulatto children for baptism in 1777, he likely judged that the parish church was a more convenient choice due to both the number and size of the candidates and perhaps on account of his and their racial status as well.¹¹⁴ A Barbadian free woman named Dolly brought her sons Robert, James, and Thomas into St. Phillip's church for their baptisms in November 1772.¹¹⁵ Anglican ministers' desperate hopes to be identified with the master class likely meant that they summoned people of color to the parish church rather

¹¹¹ Klingberg, ed., *Carolina Chronicle: The Papers of Commissary Gideon Johnston*, 163-164. Both Johnston's letter to London and a letter from Burnham to Johnston are printed here.

¹¹² Hooker, *Carolina Backcountry*, 21. April 1767.

¹¹³ Fulham Papers, 15:47-48. A baptismal certificate signed by the residents of Harbour Island, 20 October 1727. This was accomplished with "Exhortations Suitable to be given to Such Converts."

¹¹⁴ St. Andrew's Parish Register, Baptisms, 1666-1807, 92-93, 1777, JA.

¹¹⁵ St. Philip's Parish Register, Baptisms, 1648-1835, 174, 8 November 1772.

than celebrating these rites in their homes, marking an important difference with the genteel baptism of white infants.¹¹⁶ As with marriage, free people may have also recognized the prudence of baptizing in spaces in which communal memories could be created.

While free persons of color likely had to bring themselves or their children to the parish church, white slave owners could certainly summon ministers to their estate for the baptism of slaves. In Jamaica, it appears likely that some ministers celebrated the baptism of the children of planter fathers and enslaved women at home. In 1740, mulatto children named Frances, Nathaniel, Cleopatra, and Neal were baptized along with their mother Emma, “a black woman...at the house of Mr. John Ripley’s.” Three years later Susannah, another mulatto daughter of Emma was also “Baptized at Mr. Ripley’s.”¹¹⁷ The year before, a mulatto child named Dorcas was baptized at “ye house of Edmd Hyde Esqr.”¹¹⁸ Slave owners might send or allow their slaves, some of whom were their children, to be baptized in the minister’s home, such as Jane Adams, a mulatto slave baptized in the rectory at St. James’ in Barbados in 1700.¹¹⁹ Though enslaved persons might be baptized at or in their masters’ homes, others were baptized in church, as were four slaves in Goose Creek in South Carolina on Advent Sunday in 1710, just after divine service.¹²⁰ When whites were involved in the baptism of persons they enslaved, the location and the ministers’ pastoral style likely included a level of deference that corresponded to the owner’s station in life.

¹¹⁶ On the social pretensions of colonial clergy, see Annette Susan Laing, “‘All Things to All Men’: Popular Religious Culture and the Anglican Mission in Colonial America, 1701-1750” (PhD. diss., University of California Riverside, 1995).

¹¹⁷ St. Andrew’s Parish Register, Baptisms 1666-1807, 61-63, 1740-1743, JA.

¹¹⁸ St. Andrew’s Parish Register, Baptisms 1666-1807, 60-61, 1739, JA.

¹¹⁹ St. James’ Parish Register, Baptisms, 1693-1825, 24, 1 December 1700, BA.

¹²⁰ Klingberg, ed., *Carolina Chronicle of Dr. Francis Le Jau*, 86. To the Secretary, 9 February 1711.

IV. Conclusion

Marriage and baptism were powerful rites, conferring legitimacy on the most intimate realities of sexuality and reproduction. On a theological plane, the prayer book and other liturgies for these rites made major claims about ultimate things; that baptism entailed the gift of the Holy Spirit, the remission of sins, and a new birth to everlasting life and that marriage was instituted by God to signify the mystical union between Christ and the church and for the procreation of children. The reassertion of those vast claims at every marriage or baptism, however, did little to disabuse lay persons of the alternative or additional content that they often attached to those rites. Alongside the meaning proclaimed in liturgies printed and performed, residents of the plantation world experienced marriage and baptism as rites rich in social and cultural meaning, indeed as rites so powerful that they could alter human relationships in an instant.

Whites' determination to control marriage and baptism reveals the tremendous anxiety that their ritual power could engender. The reproduction of metropolitan practices of marriage and baptism was central to sustaining the fiction that the plantation colonies were settler societies that carried the values of the metropole into the wilderness. The celebration of both rites at home kept the power of marriage and baptism under lay control. In the domestic setting, universalizing theological claims ran headlong into the specificity of a small gathering of family and friends. The fiddler tuning his instrument in the corner, the table already spread, and the brimming punch bowl rendered the minister's ethereal discourse and actions marginal to the occasion. The Church of England's clergy in the plantation regions were thus constantly reminded that they served

very much at the pleasure of their lay masters. The domestication of marriage and baptism reduced clergy control over those rites, further undermining the already limited independence of clergy and any possibility that the English church might find any prophetic stance between slaves and their owners. Moreover, removing these rites from public space made them less accessible to the community in the widest sense. These privatized rites were rendered less available as any sort of model for appropriation by persons of color or poor whites and became moments of boundary maintenance for the plantation elite. Indeed, public baptisms and marriages became lesser events, associated with lower status whites and persons of color. Domestic rites were thus domesticated as well, evacuated of their spiritual egalitarianism and prophetic potential.

Slave owners followed up on this ritual privatization with a general predisposition to discourage the baptism and marriage of slaves, rites in which few Africans and only a few more Creoles were interested in any event. Though some exceptional whites catechized their slaves, clergy consistently reported planter disinterest in and indeed opposition to the baptism of slaves. With the door to baptism closed, marriage by a minister was not an option either. Whites had no interest in providing slaves with spiritual resources for the creation of new marriages, families, and identities. Marriage and baptism could create insoluble bonds that would have contributed to the autonomy of the slave community, legitimizing slaves' sexuality and reproduction and depriving slave owners of the false moral superiority they rhetorically deployed when discussing the sexual lives of the enslaved. The disruption of reproduction patterns found among slaves in the plantation colonies served planters' interests better than stable slave families of any shape, which were likely to have become the building blocks of an autonomous and

eventually rebellious slave community. Whites' consent to some Creole slaves' desire to be baptized was likely motivated by some mixture of commitment to the Christian mission and a realization that a baptized slave elite could be useful.¹²¹

The actions of free persons of color further reveal what marriage and baptism could mean in the British plantation colonies. They frequently sought out both marriage and baptism for the power those rites lent to their own domestic arrangements and to the birth and rearing of their children, as well as for the distinction from the enslaved that these ritual incorporations gave them. Even in societies dominated by racist white regimes, baptized free people were accorded a greater degree of credibility in legal actions and likely in quotidian interactions as well. Whether they sought baptism as adults or had their newborn children baptized, the free carpenters and cordwainers and free women who became members of the church found in the rite some promise that made it worth seeking. Marriage offered free couples legal and ecclesiastical sanction for their unions, meaningful in societies in which many white males regarded black women as conveniently exploitable sexual objects. The children born to a baptized and married couple were then carried to the font as well, creating a baptismal record and a legal identity that could never be expunged. These were powerful ritual resources in societies that offered few to persons of color.¹²²

¹²¹ On this point, see Robert Olwell, *Masters, Slaves, and Subjects: The Culture of Power in the South Carolina Low Country, 1740-1790* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1998), 126, 138-139. While Olwell's chapter "Communion and Community: Slavery and the Established Church" is helpful, he neglects the experience of African slaves that may have been attracted to Anglican worship because of their Catholic roots. For a useful corrective, see Annette Laing, "'Heathens and Infidels'?" African Christianization and Anglicanism in the South Carolina Low Country, 1700-1750," *Religion and American Culture: A Journal of Interpretation* 12, no. 2 (2002): 197-228.

¹²² See, for instance, the parish register for St. Andrew's in Jamaica. A good number of free people of color were married there over the course of the eighteenth century, the earliest being recorded in 1741. The grooms' occupations were sometimes recorded: carpenters, saddlers, coopers, and cordwainers were married by the minister of the parish, adding a new element of respectability to their status as honest

The social and cultural vitality that surrounded baptism and marriage demonstrate that the notorious irreligion of the British plantation colonies has been much exaggerated by historians and in ways that have distorted our understanding of the entire human community in those places. Clearly baptism and Christian marriage were powerful rites to white residents of the region. They were rites worth controlling, rites best kept private and out of the hands of the enslaved. Indeed, they were rites with which even the clergy could not be trusted. While these regions are not distinguished for any original contribution to the Christian theological tradition, they were places in which the ritual practices of Christianity provided a lively forum for seeking and making meaning in the lives of many people. Admittedly, the Christian rituals of initiation and matrimony in the British plantation colonies were joined to processes that regulated the diffusion of power throughout the social hierarchy, typical of Christian ritual practice in most places and times. Thus the meaning of ritual in the plantation colonies is a chapter in the long history of Christian worship and its situation in particular matrices of social power, rather than a chapter concerned with places in which the Christian tradition had no meaning at all.

tradesmen. St. Andrew's Parish Register, Marriages, 1666-1806, JA. In the period before 1780, the marriages of persons of color were recorded on 7 April 1698, 16 January 1741, 11 October 1747, 24 December 1749, 21 January 1753, 12 August 1753, 20 April 1765, 18 October 1770, 1 January 1771, 28 October 1779, 19 December 1779, and 9 January 1780.