

Education During the Era of Enslavement

By Melisse Ellis

DRAFT

HOW WE DEFINED EDUCATION

In the first week of this course we defined 'education' as:

- all the institutions, both formal and informal, that a society uses as the mechanism for transferring knowledge, skills, and values from one generation to the next, from one person to the next.

HOW WE DEFINED EDUCATION

Within the Context of Trinidad and Tobago History, Slavery was a Total Institution, one in which there were established mechanisms for

transferring knowledge, skills, and values from one generation to the next, from one person to the next

Slavery possessed its own systems of Education

The Multiple Education Systems of Enslaved Tobago and Trinidad

- In Trinidad, Tobago and the rest of the slave-dominated Caribbean you can argue that there were *at least two formal systems of education*.
 1. One 'mainstream' system designed to teach academic disciplines---reading, writing, arithmetic, science, etc.
 2. Another designed to teach those disciplines necessary for maintaining plantation societies---planting, cane processing, submission to plantation authorities etc.

The Multiple Education Systems of Enslaved Tobago and Trinidad

The system of fitting slaves for plantation life is considered formal education because, the ways of passing on knowledge to slaves fit many of the criteria of "formal education"

- the term formal education refers to the structured educational system
- In most countries, the formal education system is state-supported and/or state-operated

The Purpose of Education in Trinidad, Tobago, and the Wider Caribbean

- From a basic structural-functional perspective, educational system exists to teach people an agreed body of knowledge, in order to enable them to operate within society.
- 'Education' during the era of enslavement taught all parties *the body of knowledge they needed in order to enable them to operate within plantation societies based on enslavement*.

The Purpose of Education in Trinidad, Tobago, and the Wider Caribbean

- From a **conflict theory** perspective
- education serves to maintain social inequality
- preserve the power of those who dominate society.
- conflict theorists see the educational system as perpetuating the status quo by dulling the lower classes into being obedient workers.
- 'Education' during the era of enslavement taught all parties *the body of knowledge they needed in order to enable them to operate within plantation societies based on enslavement.*

Some of the Basic Knowledge

Plantation Education' was intended to Pass on

- A slave was the total property of the master of the estate.
- People could be born slaves
- *Masters were superior to slaves*
- *Slaves should totally submit to the will of their superiors on the plantation*
- *Whites were superior to coloureds, coloureds were superior to blacks*
- *For a variety of reasons this was the social order that should be it was ordained, by God even to be so.*
- *Production was the most important thing*

Education for a New Social Order

The Pre-Emancipation Era
The Education of the Enslaveds

Seasoning

- It was a process of behaviour modification.
- Already branded in Africa with the traders mark, they might be branded again with the mark of the new owner.
- They also would receive new names--usually Christian ones, or names from Classical Rome and Greece--such as Jupiter or Plato, or African-sounding names--like Quack (which was derived from the African word Quaco, meaning a male born on Wednesday) or Squash (which probably came from the word Quashee, meaning a female born on Sunday).

Seasoning

- **Seasoning** was a process conducted during the Atlantic slave trade for the purpose of "breaking" slaves.
- The practice conditioned the African captives for their new lot in life
- Newly arrived African captive would have to be trained into the daily rigors that await them on the plantations.
- This training was carried out on Plantations in the Caribbean. In some slaves were sent specifically to seasoning camps in Jamaica before they were sold to their final destination

Seasoning

- Usually older slaves would be put in charge of the seasoning process, teaching the newly purchased enslaved African how to work in gangs, how to conduct themselves, and how to adapt what they knew in Africa to the new environment of slavery.

Seasoning

- Immediately owners and their overseers sought to obliterate the identities of their newly acquired slaves, to break their wills and sever any bonds with the past.
- They forced Africans to adapt to new working and living conditions, to learn a new language and adopt new customs. They called this process 'seasoning' and it could last two or three years.

The education of the Enslaved

- The vast majority of the enslaved lacked exposure to a formal education.
- Among the enslaved were people from West Africa such as Mandingo people who had received an education in their home societies. For eg some in Trinidad were versed in Arabic Sanskrit.
- Some plantation families kept black companions for smaller children. These children would sometimes be present as their white counterparts were being instructed, not part of the lesson formally but benefiting by virtue of their presence to the lessons.

Slavery and Education

- Some argued that Africans were ineducable
- *corpus sanum without the mens sana.*" That is, they had strong and healthy bodies, but lacked sound, strong minds that should have accompanied those bodies.

Slavery and Education: Planters' View

- To maintain absolute tyranny over the persons, production, and reproduction of another class of men as chattel property, the presumption must remain for the dominant group that "slavery and knowledge are incompatible"

Planters' Disapproved of Educating Slaves because:

- Many feared that education made people unfit for manual labour
- Would be economically costly to them
- Could result in the spread of resistance ideologies among the enslaved

The Education of the Enslaved

- A few planters allowed religious instruction of their labour force. Generally selecting those denominations which they considered more conservative.
- IN ORDER TO FACILITATE Christian instruction protestant groups taught their congregation the Alphabet and the rudiments of reading.
- These Christian missionaries usually funded the education of the enslaved themselves.

The Education of the Enslaved

- A few planters allowed religious instruction of their labour force. Generally selecting those denominations which they considered more conservative.
- IN ORDER TO FACILITATE Christian instruction protestant groups taught their congregation the Alphabet and the rudiments of reading.
- These Christian missionaries usually funded the education of the enslaved themselves.
- One notable exception is Barbados' Christopher Codrington, who by a decree in his 1710 will, set up a school to train ministers to work with slaves on that island

The Education of the Enslaved

- Some planters allowed missionaries such as the Moravians to set up stations on their estates in turn they provided manual labour.
- In Jamaica for eg the Moravians established a female teachers training school in 1829
- Generally planters allowed 'useless' children to attend instruction; children who by virtue of their age were not prime labourers, boys and girls under 13
- So as not to interfere with production Sunday Schools were preferred and night schools that did not interfere with the normal work schedule

The Education of the Enslaved

- In 1823 among proposals the British Government handed down in its amelioration policy, a set of policies to improve the lives of the enslaved, was a request that schools for slave instruction be established.
- In Crown Colony islands Trinidad and British Guyana the British Government started schools for urban slave children.
- Children in urban settings received very little instruction.
- The colonial government did this because they were gradually preparing for free societies in which the demands on subjects of the Crown were different. Preparing slaves to be productive free subjects.

Formal Schools

- Some planters allowed missionaries such as the Moravians to set up stations on their estates in turn they provided manual labour.
- For eg the Moravians established a female teachers training school in 1829
- Generally planters allowed 'useless' children to attend instruction; children who by virtue of their age were not prime labourers, boys and girls under 13
- So as not to interfere with production Sunday Schools were preferred and night schools that did not interfere with the normal work schedule

The Negro Education Grant

- The British Government's Negro Education Grant assisted religious bodies to build school houses and supplemented teachers' salaries throughout the British West Indies.
- However, from 1841 the Government started reducing it by 20% every year.
- By 1845 it was completely stopped; and the British Government renounced any formal responsibility for providing education for the "Negro" population in the colonies.
- This was a terrible blow to education throughout the region. many schools did not survive the discontinuation of the Grant.

Mico Charity

- In 1835 the Mico Charity was established.
- Its aim was to provide religious and moral instruction to "Negro" and "Coloured" people in the Caribbean.
- It was an important educational trust that established schools throughout the British Caribbean.