


Extracts from David Lambert, 'Runaways and strays: Rethinking (non)human agency in Caribbean slave societies' in Sharon Wilcox and Stephanie Rutherford (eds) *Historical Animal Geographies* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2018), pp 185-198.

In Jamaica in the autumn of 1816, Swain Lungren placed a notice in the *Royal Gazette* that two enslaved brothers, Charles and Swain—presumably named after his master but known as 'Monkey'—had run away from his Smithfield estate in St. George's parish in the east of the island. Accompanying them was their elderly mother, Nancy, a name perhaps evoking the African folkloric spider-trickster, Anansi, and a stolen mule. It was believed that the party had taken refuge at an animal pen, where they had 'relations' (presumably human—but perhaps equine too?)¹ This vignette serves to dramatize a series of points about Caribbean slave societies that I seek to make in this chapter, including the entanglement of human and nonhuman worlds; the bestialization of enslaved humans; and how humans and nonhuman animals collaborated in the making—and even un-making—of slave societies. Such vignettes provide glimpses of the Caribbean's captive human-animal nexus—and of the slippery languages of slavery as it applied to human animals and non-human animals.

R U N—A W A Y for eight Months past.

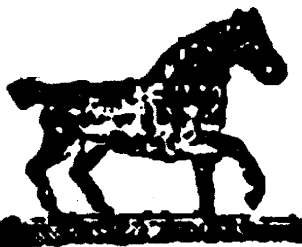


A Young Negro Man named **FREDRICK**, belonging to *Mrs. Jane Byrne*;—He has large red Eyes, works on board of Vessels, and on the Parade as a Porter. —Whoever employs him after this date without a *Note*, will make themselves liable for the Hire allowed for a Run-away.

3d September, 1799.

Figure 1: Detail from *Antigua Journal*, 3 September 1799, p. 1

Spanish Town, Jan. 9, 1782.



STRAYED from the **GOVERNMENT PENN**, about three months ago,

A DARK BAY HORSE, about 13 hands high, marked on the near buttock **P. E. S** on top. Who- ever will bring him to **CHRISTIAN DYEMAN** shall receive **FIVE POUND**s reward. 142

Figure 2: Detail from *Gazette of Saint Jago de la Vega* (Jamaica), 31 January 1782, p. 3

¹ *Royal Gazette* (Kingston, Jamaica), 14 September 1816, p.20.

In the newspapers of Britain's Caribbean colonies from the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, tiny figures took flight across the pages. These fugitives in print accompanied "runaway" notices about such individuals as a "Young Negro Man named FREDRICK, belonging to Mrs. *Jane Byrne*," a "Negro Man name BUTE. He is stout and well made" and a "negro Wench named HETTY. She is stout, has full breasts, and is supposed to be at the Ridge or on board some of the ships at English Harbour" (Figure 1).² Rewards for the apprehension of these runaways were offered, as well as warnings against employing them without the owner's note of permission: one could not expect to use another's property without financial or legal consequences. Elsewhere, similar notices brought attention to other forms of property no longer in their owners' possession. Announcements of "strays," some accompanied by miniature equine or bovine fugitives, described a "DARK BAY HORSE, about 13 hands high, marked on the near buttock" and a "Brown Cow, horns sawed" (Figure 2).³ Clearly, runaways and strays often went missing – but they were also found. Colonial gazettes carried notices of those "taken up" and held in workhouses and pounds side-by-side, waiting for their owners to reclaim them. Failure to do so would result in the forfeiture of the property and their sale by public auction.

The notices of runaways and strays—much like advertisements in the colonial Caribbean for the sale of enslaved men, women and children, horses, mules and cattle—bear troubling similarities. For example, the official Jamaican *Gazette of Saint Jago de la Vega* from November 1782 carried notice of a missing runaway, Thomas Leishman, whose left shoulder was branded with the letters "AW," alongside one for a grey mare whose buttock was marked "ID."⁴ As well as the common practice of branding, both runaways and strays also had distinguishing features that bore witness to injury and punishment: "William, a Coromantee" had a "small slit on left ear," while a "Mouse-coloured He Ass" had "two slits in each ear." There was also evidence of distant origins. "Spanish marks" upon donkeys (asses) and mules usually meant that they had been imported from Cuba, while "country marks" on the humans indicated various West African origins.

Of course, signs of scarification and tooth-filing also point to differences between runaways and strays: humans deliberately marked and altered their own bodies and those of others in culturally significant ways that non-human animals did not. Likewise, the human runaways could explain whose property they were—or be forced to do so—and they could also dissemble. For instance, the *St. George's Chronicle and Grenada Gazette* gave notice of a runaway who "pretends to be free, and calls himself Antoine."⁵ Yet, such differences should not lead us to ignore the similarities between runaways and strays. These go beyond formal parallels in how they were represented in colonial newspapers, and point to the centrality of the exercise of dominion and mastery in the Caribbean, based on hierarchical and exploitative property relations. Nor should we overlook the entangled nature of the lives of humans and nonhuman animals in colonial slave societies. To give just one example from these printed notices: "strayed" animals were sometimes seized from runaways, having (unwittingly?) aided in their flight.⁶

² See, for example, *Antigua Journal*, 4 December 1798; 3 and 24 September 1799.

³ See, for example, *Gazette of Saint Jago de la Vega* (Jamaica), 31 January 1782; *Royal Gazette* (Kingston, Jamaica), supplement, 5-12 October 1822.

⁴ *Gazette of Saint Jago de la Vega* (Jamaica), 21 November 1782, p. 3.

⁵ *St. George's Chronicle and Grenada Gazette*, 8 June 1798, p. 6.

⁶ *Royal Gazette* (Kingston, Jamaica), 3 August 1816, p. 24.

Focusing on the colonial Caribbean, this chapter offers an initial exploration of the *captive human-animal nexus* of which these newspaper notices are one source of evidence.⁷ Rather than offer a detailed empirical discussion of the entangled nature of humans and nonhuman animals in the region's slave societies, my intention is to suggest some possible areas for research. More importantly, the chapter surveys some of the key conceptual and theoretical debates of relevance to this area. In particular, I consider the notion of "agency" that has dominated work on slavery alongside recent elaborations of this concept within the field of animal studies. Despite the vitality of the latter field (e.g. Skabelund, 2013; Few and Tortorici, 2013; Kalof, 2014; Roy and Sivasundaram, 2015), there has been little engagement with more-than-human approaches among scholars of slavery in the Americas, including the Caribbean. Indeed, this chapter seeks to encourage scholars within the field of animal studies to examine societies where human slavery existed *and* to urge historians of slavery to engage with the animal turn. While this chapter's focus is on the particular historical-geographical context of Britain's Caribbean colonies in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries—that is by the time 'mature' plantation societies had developed but prior to the formal abolition of human slavery—it also ranges beyond to consider, and draw on, work on slavery in the Americas more broadly.

References

- Few, M., and Tortorici, Z. (Eds.) (2013) *Centering animals in Latin American history*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
- Kalof, L. (2014) Introduction. In L. Kalof (Ed.) *The Oxford handbook of animal studies* (pp.1-21). Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Roy, R.D. and Sivasundaram, S. (Eds) (2015) Nonhuman empires, special section in *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East*, 35.
- Skabelund, A. (2013). Animals and imperialism: Recent historiographical trends. *History Compass*, 11, 801-807.

⁷ For an example of other work in this direction, see S. Seymour, Mules and 'improvement': Refashioning animals and Caribbean slave plantations. Paper presented at the annual conference of the Royal Geographical Society (with the Institute of British Geographers), London, 2 September 2011; D. Lambert (2015) Master-horse-slave: Mobility, race and power in the British West Indies, c.1780–1838. *Slavery & Abolition*, 36, 618-641.