
Family Structure and Jewish Continuity in Jamaica since 1655

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During the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries the center of Jewish life in the British colonies was not in North America but rather in the West Indies. As late as 1775, according to Jacob Marcus, there were as many Jews in Jamaica as in all of Canada and the thirteen colonies.¹ At their height in 1720, the Jews comprised about 10 percent of the white population.² Until the late nineteenth century there were still some 1,800 Jews. After 1900 demographic decline set in. Today there are only 125 subscribing members in the one surviving synagogue, which has been without the services of a rabbi for ten years.

Unlike the United States, the Jewish community of Jamaica has been a predominantly Sephardic one whose origins can be traced to the discovery of the island in 1494. The first record of Jewish settlement dates from 1530,³ and a Portuguese enclave developed after 1580 when Columbus' granddaughter married into the house of Braganza. It was the fall of Recife in 1654, followed by the English conquest of 1655, that led to substantial Jewish settlement in the West Indies and Jamaica in particular. Initially, the community was entirely Sephardic, with wills being written in Spanish into the eighteenth century. Ashkenazim began to appear in the later 1700's. The first Ashkenazic will in the collection of the American Jewish Archives is that of Moses Levy of Drighlingen, filed in 1767. Even today, the community remains largely Sephardic. In answer to a questionnaire which I circulated in the spring of 1986, 70.5 percent of the respondents indicated that they were of Sephardic origin, 9.75 percent noted Ashkenazic, and 9.75 percent could claim ancestry from both groups.

Jews settled the breadth and width of Jamaica. With but few exceptions, the pattern of settlement was essentially urban and mirrors the mercantile role Jews played in this land economy. In every important town and parish capital a Jewish burial ground can be located or in

some cases uncovered. At one point in the middle decades of the eighteenth century, there were five synagogues: the oldest in Port Royal, dating from 1688 or even earlier,⁴ Spanish Town, Kingston, Sav-le-Mar, and Lucea. Perhaps private homes in other towns, such as Falmouth and Black River, also served this function. A congregation in Montego Bay was eventually consecrated in the mid-nineteenth century as well. Today there is but one synagogue, in the city of Kingston, where surviving Ashkenazim and Sephardim pray under one roof.

During the seventeenth century, Port Royal was the center of Jamaican Jewish life, followed in importance by St. Jago de la Vera. The great earthquake of 1692 destroyed Port Royal. Though the synagogue was rebuilt and Jews continued to live in Port Royal, Kingston soon emerged as the economic focal point. In his study of wills from the late seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, Melvin Zager offers the following geographical distribution of the Jewish population: Kingston 43 percent, St. Catherine (primarily involving here Spanish Town) 23 percent, Port Royal 23 percent, St. Thomas-in-the-Vale 5 percent, St. Andrews 5 percent, and Clarendon 1 percent.⁵

Like their colonial coreligionists to the north, the Jews of Jamaica were an urban minority group who functioned primarily as merchants and shopkeepers. Wills located in the American Jewish Archives confirm this pattern, though not all Jews presumably owned sufficient property to bother with a will. Of the eighty-three testators who indicated their employment or livelihood, forty-six were merchants, thirteen shopkeepers, ten planters, six gentlemen, two goldsmiths, one a "practitioner of physick," one a liver, one a distiller, and one a housekeeper. Available marriage records for the late eighteenth to the late nineteenth century suggest a similar occupational structure.⁶ Of those bridegrooms whose professions were indicated in the records, fifty-eight were merchants, fifty-three were clerks, nine shopkeepers, two craftsmen, and one from the clergy. There were also three professionals, but they were men born in the last quarter of the century when Jews began to make a major imprint on the development of the modern Jamaican economy. While Jewish doctors could be found from a very early date, there were no Jewish lawyers until the 1840's. Since the late nineteenth century, the social profile of the Jewish community has changed considerably from that of a middle- and lower-middle-class minority group to that of an upper-, upper-middle-, and middle-

class ethnic element that forms part of the contemporary social elite. About 37 percent of the respondents to my questionnaire identified themselves as professionals, 29 percent as housewives, 22 percent as entrepreneurs, 2.5 percent as both professionals and entrepreneurs, 2.5 percent as shopkeepers, with 7.0 percent providing no response or an inapplicable answer.

Unlike the United States, where successive waves of Jewish immigration formed a fairly heterogeneous social structure, the occupational composition of the Jewish community in Jamaica was far more uniform. Here the tradition was overwhelmingly mercantile, with virtually no artisan or working-class contribution. The importance of this legacy must be considered in any attempt to explain the pioneering entrepreneurial role of Jews in the development of the modern Jamaican economy. When opportunity knocked at the turn of the twentieth century, the Jews of Jamaica were ready to play a leading role.

Acceptance of the Jews by the Creole community came grudgingly. While from a very early date Jews were free to practice their religion, they did suffer the pangs of prejudice. Most disabling of all the discriminatory laws and customs was the policy of unequal taxation, the so-called Jews' Tribute, which ended with the 1740 naturalization act. Until 1831, moreover, Jews could neither vote nor hold office. Religious antagonism only partially explains the second-class citizenship of Jamaican Jewry. Far more determinant was the competition that Jewish merchants presented their Creole rivals. The latter feared the Jews' business acumen and held their loyalty suspect. Jews appeared to them as a foreign element and as such had to be carefully monitored.

The charge of dual loyalty is a familiar one in the history of anti-Semitism, a self-fulfilling prophecy whereby the anti-Semite accuses the Jews of forming a state within a state, and discriminates against them accordingly, which in turn leads to Jewish withdrawal and self-reliance. Something like this scenario occurred in the aftermath of the English conquest of Jamaica. Jews were both visible and cosmopolitan, often with one foot in Europe and the other in the British West Indies. In this regard, Jews were just like Creole planters or merchants who had family back in London or who returned to England after amassing sufficient wealth. Jews were different only in the wider

scope of their contacts overseas. Many Jamaican Jews had parents, siblings, or close cousins not just in England but also in Holland, France, Germany, North America, and the other Caribbean islands. Jews in Jamaica apparently were able to maintain communication even with their Marrano relatives on the Iberian peninsula. One Jew living in Kingston, for example, willed that his niece share her inheritance with her nephews in Portugal or Spain “if they shall come and embrace Judaism.”⁷

As a result of anti-Jewish legislation and attitudes, the Jamaican community developed the very dual identity that they were accused of harboring. Relative to the Jews residing in the thirteen colonies and later the American republic, the Jews of Jamaica were less integrated into the wider society. British North America was a comparatively open environment with seemingly unlimited opportunity; Jamaica, by contrast, was a closed, xenophobic plantation society where commercial competition was intense. For geographic, social, and economic reasons, it was much easier for American Jews to merge into the wider public. A comparison of eighteenth-century wills confirms this. While testators in both British North America and Jamaica frequently called upon Christians to serve as witnesses, it was much more common for American Jews to go outside the family and the Jewish community in appointing executors. Of the over 120 wills of Jamaican Jews deposited in the American Jewish Archives, only one (Isaac Da Silva Fonseca, 1767) nominated a Christian executor. In contrast, of some twenty-four American wills from the same period, eight Jews chose Gentiles to serve as executors.

Other evidence suggests that Jews won greater acceptance among the Christian population of the thirteen colonies than in the island of Jamaica. Marcus estimates that in the larger colonial towns and cities of North America, as high as 10 percent of the marriages of Jews involved Gentile spouses.⁸ Assimilation intensified during the Federal period, if we accept Malcolm Stern’s findings that 28.7 percent of the weddings between 1776 and 1840 involving Jews were outmarriages.⁹ In Jamaica, however, marriage between Jew and Christian was taboo and did not become commonplace until the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

“Much more than their contemporaries in the northern British mainland colonies,” Marcus writes, “the Jews of the British West In-

dies faced the Old World rather than the New.”¹⁰ Both as a cause and a consequence of their cosmopolitanism, Jamaican Jews retained a clearer and more sharply defined self-identity. There are, for example, numerous references by Jamaican Jews in their wills to their belonging to a “nation.” In 1724 Rachel Nunes requested that she be “decently buried in the burial place appointed for my nation the Jews in Le-guenea [*sic*] in the parish of St. Andrews.” In 1768 Aaron Baruch Lousada bequeathed 30 pounds to “the poor of the Jewish Nation.” Language like this, of course, can be found in American wills from the same period, but with much less frequency. In the nineteenth century, Jamaican Jews would write in the same vernacular. John Lee of Hanover requested in 1831, the year of enfranchisement, that he “be buried according to the rights of my religious profession.” He went on, expressing the wish to be buried “in as plain a manner as possible, according to the rites of the Jewish persuasion, in which faith I die”¹¹ From “nation” to “persuasion” marks the distance Jamaican Jews had traveled since the English conquest.

In addition to a more clearly articulated sense of nationality, the Jews of Jamaica evidenced a greater religiosity than their American counterparts. Though their numbers were roughly equal in the mid-eighteenth century, the Jews of Jamaica at one point operated five synagogues, in comparison to just one congregation in New York. Whereas in North America there were no rabbis and no theological tradition until the nineteenth century, Jamaica attracted leading rabbis from Europe and produced the first English-language text on Judaism, DeCordova’s *Reason and Faith* of 1788. Wills of Jamaican Jews further document a deeper attachment to their faith and religious institutions. It was normal for Jamaican Jews to leave legacies for their synagogues or bequeath a sum of money to a relative or friend for the offering of a commemorative prayer on Yom Kippur or *kaddish*. Such expressions of religious feeling and identity were most uncommon in the wills of American Jews from the same period. In fact, Jamaican Jews were officially orthodox in their worship until 1935, though a reforming spirit could be detected from as early as 1913 when the first transliteration of the Hebrew prayer book became available.

Community self-help and solidarity, so evident in the wills of Jamaican Jews, contributed significantly to the survival and ultimate success of the group. With but one exception, that of David Bravo, charitable

legacies were entirely Jewish-oriented and reinforced a dual identity. The dual identity shared by Jamaican Jews survived well past emancipation in 1831 but in an attenuated form akin to that held by their American coreligionists. As in the United States, a dual identity survived successful assimilation and extensive intermarriage. Even to this day, Jews in Jamaica perceive their Jewishness in more than purely religious terms. When asked about their identity as Jews, 29 percent of those responding to my questionnaire indicated a purely religious association, 12 percent noted an ethnic-cultural tie, and 54 percent understood their Jewishness as both religious and cultural (5 percent did not answer). The Jews remain, as one community elder is fond of putting it, a "stiff-necked lot." Even in Jamaica, where its Jewry is perhaps the most integrated community of the entire Diaspora, assimilation is never entirely complete.

The cohesiveness of the Jewish community was not the only source of Jewish survival and success. In fact, community support functioned more as a back-up mechanism to the family unit, which after all was primarily responsible for the well-being of its members. In Jamaica (and elsewhere) there is a general impression that Jews maintain unusually strong family bonds, with the father playing a decisive role. The image of the Jewish family and the role of the father is a generally favorable one in a society accustomed to single-parenting and accounts in no small part for the philo-Semitism found on the island. Certainly, there is a negative Shylock image as well, but Jamaica remains one of the least anti-Semitic countries in the world today. The family deserves attention then for a number of reasons, not the least being the current economic success of the community. In her recent book, *Minorities and Power in a Black Society* (1987), Carol Holzberg attributes the upward mobility of Jews to the cohesive bonds of family. The cooperation of family members in the creation of the entrepreneurial dynasties of the Matalons or Henriqueses illustrates this pattern convincingly.

Until this century, the tradition of large families predominated. While it is difficult to determine family size from the available records,¹² there are enough cases to substantiate the traditional pattern. The Delgado family tree,¹³ for example, includes Moses Delgado, the individual who played the leading role in the effort to win the full civil and political liberties that were granted in 1831. Moses was one of

Menasseh Delgado's five children, married twice himself, and fathered altogether ten children. Moses' brother, Isaac, was a Kingston merchant who in turn headed a family of seventeen children. Examples of large families can be found well into this century. The five sons of Sam Henriques went on to form a great construction and engineering firm which rebuilt Kingston in the aftermath of the 1907 earthquake. From humble beginnings, the Henriques brothers built one of the great business empires in contemporary Jamaica. The seven Matalon brothers, of modest origins as well, collaborated in forming one of the greatest entrepreneurial consortia on the island.

Religion is only part of the explanation for this demographic pattern. Large families may also have confirmed social and economic status. But the main reason was the precarious nature of life in those days. Demographic wastage was significant, as a visit to any burial ground will show. Of the thirteen inscriptions I read or could read on tombstones in the Jewish cemetery of Falmouth, three of the individuals buried there were under the age of three. Or take the case of Jacob and Leah Brandon from the mid-nineteenth century, a couple who had thirteen children, three of whom died in infancy. Interestingly, of the remaining ten, five married outside the faith. One of the few surviving records relevant here is the death register from the Kingston synagogue, covering the period March 7, 1824 to October 23, 1825.¹⁴ Age group of the deceased was indicated in seventy-nine instances; of these seventy-nine, forty-two were adults and thirty-seven were children.

The high rates of infant, child, and adolescent mortality help explain the frequency with which testators remembered their nieces and nephews. Dowries had to be provided. Isaac Pereira Brandon (1740), a Kingston merchant, outlived two of his three sons and left 200 pounds for each of his four fatherless granddaughters. Jael Massias (1730), a widow herself from Spanish Town, remembered six children in her will, a number of whom had yet to reach maturity. Daniel Lopez Narbona (1707) bequeathed a 50 pounds yearly payment for his widowed daughter-in-law, and Abraham Mendes Quixano (1741) left 5 pounds to his daughter, who had remarried after the death of her first husband. Throughout the wills of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, it is the subjunctive voice that dominates. More than a mere stylistic device, the use of the subjunctive captured the uncertainty of contemporary life.

Males tended to marry at a rather advanced age. According to synagogue records, which indicated not only the profession of the groom but also age, Jamaican Jewish men married at a mean age of 26.5 between 1852 and 1949.¹⁵ Fluctuation was minimal over this period; between 1852 and 1881, the average age was 26.09; it was 27.84 between 1882 and 1921, and 26.00 between 1922 and 1949. No male married at an age younger than twenty, with the oldest groom for a first marriage being thirty-seven. Professor Marcus's explanation—that the man had to first establish himself financially—best accounts for the late age of marriage. Marriages were, after all, based on parental consent, and the prospective bridegroom had to be marketable. As for the woman, there is no reliable indication of age, but wills indicate that marriage was conceivable for a female under the age of sixteen (cf. the will of Mordecai Da Silva, 1739). Most daughters became eligible to receive their legacy somewhere between their eighteenth and twenty-first birthdays or on their marriage day, whichever came first.

Wills from the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries document the importance of the extended family in Jamaican Jewish life. The economic life of Jamaica was anything but insular, and the family contacts of Jews overseas were invaluable assets. The Jamaican economy then as now was largely export-oriented, its goods sold in exchange for necessary imports and luxury items. What has changed is the nature of the labor force (from slave and later indentured to free), the products traded (from dependence on sugar to a mixed economy based on sugar, bauxite, bananas, tourism, etc.), and the market destination (from a more British to a predominantly North American orientation). Jewish families, separated by a vast ocean, collaborated financially and not infrequently worked together in the same business. Once again, the surviving wills indicate a fluid transatlantic current of capital and money and emphasize the importance of kinfolk overseas. Jamaican Jews commonly remembered the siblings and cousins they left behind in Europe. Asher Cohen of Kingston (1708), formerly Angle Jacobs of London, instructed his executors to reimburse his two brothers in London for the money they had made available. In one case, that of the merchant Jacob Fonseca (1729), the father and eldest son moved to New York, leaving behind in Jamaica the father's spouse and six other children. Between Europe and Jamaica and between British North America and the British West Indies, a good deal of money passed, and

a not insubstantial amount of business took place.

In a time when pensions, social security, welfare, and retirement homes did not exist, the family—both extended and immediate—functioned as the primary institution of support and maintenance. According to the wills drawn up by Jamaican Jews, it was expected that children or in-laws would look after the testator's spouse following his death. Wives of testators lived with their mothers-in-law; children, if underage, lived with their aunts and uncles; and so on. A most remarkable evidence of the cohesiveness of the extended Jewish family in Jamaica is the tendency of intramarriage, i.e., marriage within the family. From the earliest recorded wills down to the present, Jamaican Jews have engaged extensively in the practice of marrying first cousins (cf. the wills of David Alvarez [1693] and Abraham Azevedo [1721]). Isaac Pereira Brandon, the aforementioned Kingston merchant who bequeathed money to his four fatherless granddaughters, offered a financial incentive for his granddaughter Rebecca (daughter of his deceased son Moses) to marry his grandson David (scion of his son Jacob). If Rebecca refused David and married someone else with the consent of her mother, she would receive only 200 pounds. If instead she decided to marry David, the inheritance would increase tenfold. David also stood to lose if he refused to marry Rebecca. The pattern of marriage within the extended family can still be seen in operation among some of the more prominent clans in contemporary Jamaica. For generations Ashenheims married DeCordovas. This family affair has also been a successful business relationship. It was the DeCordova brothers who started the *Daily Gleaner*, one of the oldest newspapers in the world and the leading publication in the Caribbean. For decades now the Ashenheims have participated in the management of the journal. Similarly, the Cohen Henriqueses have married Melhados. No one explanation accounts for this pattern. Certainly, the economic motivation of family cohesiveness played a part. Dowries presented to first cousins function as a sort of trust or self-sustaining fund for the family and the direct descendants of the testators. Demographic restrictions must also be considered. The fact that there were never very many Jews on the island meant that the marriage pool would be shallow. Finally, one should not discount a possibly different concept of "family." What was culturally uncommon or taboo in other societies and other Jewish communities was and remains an accepted fact of

Jewish life in Jamaica.

"The balance," writes Professor Jacob Katz, "between the independence of the nuclear family on the one hand, and security of the extended family may have helped Jews accommodate to modern conditions, either in their original homelands or after immigration."¹⁶ So it was in Jamaica, where underneath the broad and protective umbrella of the extended family, members of the nuclear unit huddled together. Within this tightly knit family group, the males generally, but especially the father, exercised enormous authority. It was very common for male testators to impose conditions on their womenfolk or provide financial incentives in the hope of influencing the future behavior of their families. Legacies to spouses, for example, were often contingent upon their continued widowhood. One can imagine how effective were such incentives not to remarry. Aaron Baruch Lousada, a Kingston merchant (1768), willed his wife Rachel 4,000 pounds and six of his black house servants on the condition that she remain a widow. His son Emmanuel followed in the father's footsteps, leaving his wife, Esther, 6,000 pounds sterling, 2,000 pounds current money, plate, jewels, furniture, the house on Duke Street, and over twenty slaves "so long as she shall remain a widow."

Paternal authority extended to the daughter, whereby her inheritance or dowry was transmitted only with the marital consent of the mother or the approval of the executors or both. David Alvares, for example, bequeathed 800 pounds to his daughter Rica with the wish that her marriage be with a good person; as for his other unmarried daughter, Judith, she would be eligible to receive the same amount plus a jewel valued at 200 pounds "charging her that she be married to an honorable and God-fearing person." As for his two other, married daughters, Alvares obviously had approved the arrangements and rewarded them each with an additional 200 pounds sterling. Esther had married a doctor, and Sarah had wedded her father's nephew.

Through the institution of marriage and the provision of dowry, males were able to affect dramatically if not control the behavior of their granddaughters and nieces. Abraham Mendes Quixano (1741) left 1,500 pounds for his granddaughter Sarah, provided she married with parental consent. If not, then her three brothers would be entitled to her inheritance. Isaac Nunes (1765) reserved 100 pounds for his niece Sarah to be paid three months after her marriage "provided she

intermarrys with the consent and approbation of her parents.”

In some cases fathers attempted to exert their authority over their sons and influence their behavior. Jacob Brandon (1710) and David Bravo (1749) both tried to make their sons toe the line and at the same time look after their spouses in the event of their death. Jacob Baruh Alvares (1723), a Port Royal merchant, provided dowry for his daughter and willed her a slavegirl by the name of Amber. Alvares expressed concern that his son, David, might “molest, hinder, or recover the said girl.” If that were to happen, his daughter Leah would receive 100 pounds in lieu of the slavegirl, and the sum would be paid out of David’s legacy.

These examples of efforts by fathers to discipline their sons are rare and should not be interpreted as a leveling of gender discrimination. There was in fact a very clear double standard, a code of sex-related rules of behavior that in part issued out of the father’s authority. Sons were free to marry the woman of their choice; daughters required approval. The price of marrying without consent was her dowry, and without a dowry spinsterhood was the likely result. I came across only one instance where it would have been financially ill-advised for a male heir to disavow his testator’s wishes, and that was the case of David, scion of the aforementioned Isaac Pereira Brandon.

The double standard applied to a wide range of social relations. As earlier stated, outmarriage was uncommon until the mid- to late nineteenth century, but when instances occurred it was almost invariably the man who wedded outside the faith. Less restricted in whom he could court and marry, the Jewish male was in a more favorable position than the female to transgress family values and community mores, if in fact his behavior was even considered a transgression. The same applied in instances of sexual relations between Jew and Christian, though it should be noted that it is often difficult to determine from surviving wills the precise nature of the relationship between a testator and his non-Jewish lover. There seems little doubt in the case of Michael Levy, who willed his estate to his “friend and housekeeper,” a Frances Warren. The two children she bore Levy were each to receive 1,000 pounds “if they were educated and brought up in the Jewish faith.” The case of Benjamin Bravo (1742) is far more ambiguous, an apparently single St. Andrew planter who instructed his executors to pay a Mrs. Jane Collier, 200 pounds for her passage back to

England upon his death. The same uncertainty is evident in the case of Isaac Bravo (1723), who also appears to have been single and who bequeathed four slaves and land to a Mrs. Sarah Lamb, who was then with child. How did Bravo know that the lady was pregnant unless she was well advanced, and why will her such a substantial inheritance? The point is that there were really no obstacles to sexual relations between Jewish men and Christian women. Contrast a Michael Levy with a Hannah Rodriguez Brandon, daughter of Joseph Brandon (1774 – 1829). Against her father's wishes, Hannah married a Gentile actor from England, one John Shaw, and together they had a child named Eliza. Soon after their marriage, Shaw set sail for China and the East Indies to seek fortune or at least an alternative to his current poverty. Essentially, Shaw abandoned his wife and child, who then found refuge with Joseph. Shaw would later write letters to his wife, but according to the story that has been handed down through the succeeding generations, Joseph Brandon never allowed Hannah to read them. This was not a marriage he approved, and he was not going to facilitate a reunion if at all possible.¹⁷

If outmarriage remained a rarity until the nineteenth century, concubinage and miscegenation were widely practiced. One need only witness the profusion of Jewish surnames on a Christian island. As Barry Higman has shown in his *Slave Population and Economy in Jamaica, 1807 – 1834*, the rate of miscegenation was highest in Kingston, followed by the other urban centers, where there was a higher ratio of female to male slaves and a smaller average slaveholding than in the country.¹⁸ Since most Jews owned at least several slaves and congregated in Kingston and the other towns, it is fair to assume that Jews liberally indulged themselves in sexual relations with nonwhites and kept concubines of color. This, of course, was an activity practiced solely by the menfolk, who as earlier mentioned did not marry until their mid-twenties. Frequently, the Jewish male would first father a concubitous family before starting his own legal family. This was the case for Jacob Brandon, a storeowner, who sired three children out of wedlock (the Christian Brandons) and afterward had thirteen children (the Jewish Brandons) with his wife, Leah. As fortune would have it, the grandchildren of Brandon's concubine would one day live next door to his legitimate grandchildren. One afternoon, when one of the former wandered into the latter's house, the Christian child noticed

something very familiar and asked his Jewish neighbor, "What are you doing with a picture of my grandfather?"¹⁹

Other cases of miscegenation abound in the wills from the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Elias Lazarus (1762) of St. Catherine bequeathed a slave and her two children to his mulatto daughter by a free black. Moses Levy Alvares (1765), a St. Catherine shopkeeper, willed his slavewoman Nanny and 5 pounds to his quadroon child Sally, begotten on a mulatto slave. Desiring no confusion in the execution of his estate, Alvares added that Nanny was the slave bearing the initials M.A. on her right shoulder. Finally, a number of the manumissions inscribed in surviving wills suggest that miscegenation had been at play.

Sexual relations between Jewish men and Gentile women of all colors—conjugal or otherwise—were condoned; in contrast, the sexual activities of the Jewish woman were possible only with her husband, who in virtually every case was of the same faith. The rationale for such a blatant double standard should not be too difficult to imagine. First of all, the practices of concubinage and miscegenation were widespread throughout the island. And with Jewish men marrying in their mid-twenties, what were they supposed to do with themselves until they actually took a bride and crushed the wineglass? Finally, what did it matter ultimately if many trees were planted so long as the family bush bore fruit?

One final but certainly not exhaustive prerogative enjoyed by men was the probating of an estate to the unlawfully begotten children of a male heir. According to the available wills, a man's illegitimate offspring were eligible to inherit. Jacob Lopes Torres (1768) willed that should his son, David, father *any* children, each grandchild was to receive 2,000 pounds on the condition that they marry with David's consent. In the case that they were legally conceived, they would then receive the interest, rents, issues, and profits from his estate. Should David's progeny be born out of wedlock, then this part of the estate would belong to his daughter and her heirs, who naturally were assumed to be legitimate. Interestingly, David's illegitimate children were still entitled to the 2,000 pounds.

The Jamaican Jewish male enjoyed a number of privileges which supplemented the prerogatives sanctioned by the traditional family structure. It must be stated in fairness, however, that women were not

disadvantaged by the domestic arrangement. As was the custom according to family law, Jewish women in Jamaica were well provided for and properly supported by their husbands and fathers. Frequently the wife was appointed sole executrix, a reflection of the affection and esteem in which the testator held his spouse. After all, she often assisted her husband in his business during his lifetime and on occasion continued to operate the enterprise after his death. Once individual legacies were specified, it was usually the wife who inherited the remainder of the estate. In cases where the son or daughter was the principal beneficiary, the testator authorized an annuity or some form of regular support for the remainder of his spouse's days. Upon her death the estate generally passed on to the male line of the family or, in cases where there were no children, to the male line of a sibling or a cousin. Rarely did a will leave an estate to anyone outside the family, nuclear or extended.

As for the daughter, the father invariably bequeathed a sum of money that fell due on her majority or on the day of her marriage, whichever came first. This legacy served as the girl's dowry. Moreover, fathers generally instructed their executors to maintain, support, and educate their daughters in what was sometimes described as a "decent" and "genteel" manner. (Sons, of course, were also supported.) Jewish women, then, were not ruthlessly abused or exploited, as a jaundiced reading of the wills might suggest. True, men could do things that women could not; but generally the family functioned as an emotional as well as an economic unit, which nourished deep affection and provided generous support in case of death.

The structure of and interaction within the Jewish family help the historian understand why so small a community was able to survive and thrive in Jamaica for centuries. In many respects, what happened in Jamaica was true of Jewish settlements elsewhere and mercantile families generally, Jewish or Gentile. And yet there were, as shown here, distinctive features about Jewish life in an island society where at first black slaves and later free blacks greatly outnumbered whites, who in turn dissociated themselves from the minuscule Jewish minority. Jamaican Jews remained a pariah group much longer than their American coreligionists but assimilated more rapidly and more successfully than their brethren across the Atlantic. As was the case throughout the Diaspora, it was the family that provided the emotion-

al and economic means of survival in Jamaica, and it did so with amazing constancy over the *longue durée*.

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Notes

Research for this article derived primarily from the wills of seventeenth- and eighteenth-century Jews held by the American Jewish Archives in Cincinnati (boxes 1910 and 1911). Other sources used were interviews I conducted while in Jamaica as well as results from a questionnaire I circulated to the Jewish community of Jamaica in the spring of 1986. Only those of Jewish parentage resident in Jamaica for a minimum of twenty years were asked to respond. Of a possible 150 respondents, forty-one replied.

1. Jacob R. Marcus, *Colonial American Jew*, vol. 1 (Detroit, 1970), p. 102.
2. Stephen A. Fortune, *Merchants and Jews: The Struggle for British West Indian Commerce, 1650 – 1750* (Gainsville, 1984), p. 48.
3. Sir Neville Ashenheim to Jacob Marcus, June 10, 1964, American Jewish Archives (hereafter AJA). Cf. also Richard Hill, *Eight Chapters in the History of Jamaica from A.D. 1508 to A.D. 1680, Illustrating the Settlement of the Jews on the Island* (Kingston, 1868). According to Hill, Portugallo Colon, the marquis of Jamaica and a descendant of Columbus, was the uncontrolled proprietor of the island and sheltered Portuguese Jews from the Inquisition in Iberia, Spanish America, and Brazil. Later in 1580 the Braganza branch of Columbus' family offered asylum to Jews. In Jamaica, "they had continued, a numerous body at the time of the English conquest" (pp. iv – v). Hill also makes reference to Clarendon's State Papers, which relate the secret communication from Don Fenym, a Spanish secretary to the Duke of Buckingham, then the ambassador to Madrid, that Jamaica was being colonized mainly by "Portuguese."
4. Ashenheim to Marcus, AJA. The earliest reference to a synagogue in a will is 1700. Joseph DaCosta Alvarenga left money to two synagogues, one in Port Royal and the other in Spanish Town.
5. Melvin R. Zager, "Aspects of the Economic, Religious, and Social History of the Eighteenth Century Jamaican Jews Derived from Their Wills" (Hebrew Union College term paper, 1956), AJA. According to my count of the testators who indicated their residence, fifty were from Kingston, twenty-five from St. Catherine (primarily Spanish Town), thirteen from Port Royal, four from St. Andrews, three from St. Thomas-in-the-Vale, two from St. Elizabeth, two from St. James, and one each from Vere, Clarendon, St. Marys, St. Dorothys, St. Johns, and Serge Island. Four lived outside Jamaica at the time they wrote their wills, and eleven made no indication.
6. Kingston, Jamaica. Marriage records, eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, Box 2137, AJA.
7. Will of Isaac de Mella (1768), Box 1910, AJA.
8. Marcus, *Colonial American Jew*, vol. 3, p. 1232.
9. Malcolm Stern, "Jewish Marriage and Inter-marriage in the Federal Period," *American Jewish Archives*, 19 (November 1967); cited by Moshe Davis, "Mixed Marriage in Western Jewry: Historical Background to the Jewish Response," *Jewish Journal of Sociology* 10 (December 1968): 180.

10. Marcus, *Colonial American Jew*, vol. 1, p. 138.
11. Will of John Lee (1831), AJA.
12. Earthquakes and fires have destroyed most official records of the Jewish community. Wills provide some idea, but these documents may not mention all children and, except where the husband knew his wife to be pregnant, do not account for children born after the filing date.
13. The author wishes to express appreciation to Audrey Pinto for supplying this information.
14. Kingston, Jamaica. Register of Deaths March 7, 1824 – October 23, 1825, Congregation Kaal Kadosh Shahar Ashamaim, AJA.
15. Kingston, Jamaica. Marriage records, eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, Box 2137, AJA.
16. Jacob Katz, *The Traditional Jewish Family in Historical Perspective* (New York, 1983), p. 8.
17. Interview in Kingston in 1986 with Phyllis Morais whose cooperation was enormously helpful and for which I am grateful.
18. Barry Higman, *Slave Population and Economy in Jamaica, 1807 – 1834* (London, 1976), pp. 142 ff.
19. Interview with Phyllis Morais.