

Strickland, Matthew Blake. "Anglican Baptisms of People of African Descent in Jamaica, 1669-1800," *Journal of Slavery and Data Preservation* 5, no. 4 (2024): 10-17.

<https://doi.org/10.25971/1zqp-yy74>.

Anglican Baptisms of People of African Descent in Jamaica, 1669-1800

Peer-Reviewed Dataset Article

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Description

Anglican Baptisms of People of African Descent in Jamaica, 1669-1800, is a dataset that includes records of 21,776 people of African descent who were baptized in the Church of England in colonial Jamaica. The dataset begins in 1669, marking the first recorded baptism of

a non-white person—a “negro” woman named Taeylenia in St. Catherine Parish. The dataset extends to the year 1800, serving as a historical bookend before the dramatic shifts in the nineteenth century, such as the abolition of the slave trade in 1807, amelioration in the 1820s, and eventual emancipation in the 1830s. The eighteenth century represents the peak of the institution of slavery in the British Atlantic world, with an estimated 1,012,782 enslaved Africans disembarking in Jamaica between 1701 and 1800, according to the *Transatlantic Slave Trade Database*.¹ Therefore, 1800 serves as a significant near-endpoint for this crucial century in the history of slavery.

There are nineteen Anglican baptismal registries from seventeen parishes in colonial Jamaica that record the baptisms of both white and non-white people up to 1800. The original registries are housed in the Registrar General's Department in Spanish Town, Jamaica. However, access to these records has been restricted since 2020 due to the closure of the Spanish Town Archives. Fortunately, these registries were photographed by the Genealogical Society of Utah in 1983 and made available on eighty-six microfilm reels. These reels have since been digitized and are now accessible online through *FamilySearch*, allowing for remote access to these invaluable historical documents. Some registries are more complete than others. For example, the records for Kingston and St. Catherine Parish appear to be relatively intact, while others, like St. Mary's registry, are missing significant portions of their records due to poor recordkeeping or deterioration caused by the tropical environment.

The dataset is significant for adding depth to the study of slavery and religion, particularly within the context of the British Americas.² Although much scholarship³ has explored the role of Anglican Christianity in the lives of both free and enslaved people, this dataset offers granular details that are often absent from broader treatises, sermons, or letters. By examining people of African descent in Jamaica who participated in the Anglican Church, the dataset provides a more nuanced understanding of the intersection of race, religion, and colonial society.

¹ Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade Database – Estimate, <https://www.slavevoyages.org/assessment/estimates>.

² This type of statistical analysis builds on the work already undertaken by B. W. Higman. See Higman, *Slave Populations of the British Caribbean, 1807-1834* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1984).

³ See Sylvia R. Frey and Betty Wood, *Come Shouting to Zion: African American Protestantism in the American South and British Caribbean to 1830* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1998); Frank J. Klingberg, *Codrington Chronicle: An Experiment in Anglican Altruism on a Barbados Plantation, 1710-1834* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1949); J. Harry Bennett, Jr., *Bondsmen and Bishops: Slavery and Apprenticeship on the Codrington Plantations of Barbados, 1710-1838* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1958); Travis Glasson, *Mastering Christianity: Missionary Anglicanism and Slavery in the Atlantic World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012); Katharine Gerbner, *Christian Slavery: Conversion and Race in the Protestant Atlantic World* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2018); and Matthew Blake Strickland, “Civilizing Slavery: Imperialism, Anglicanism, and African Slavery in Barbados” (PhD diss., University of Florida, 2019).

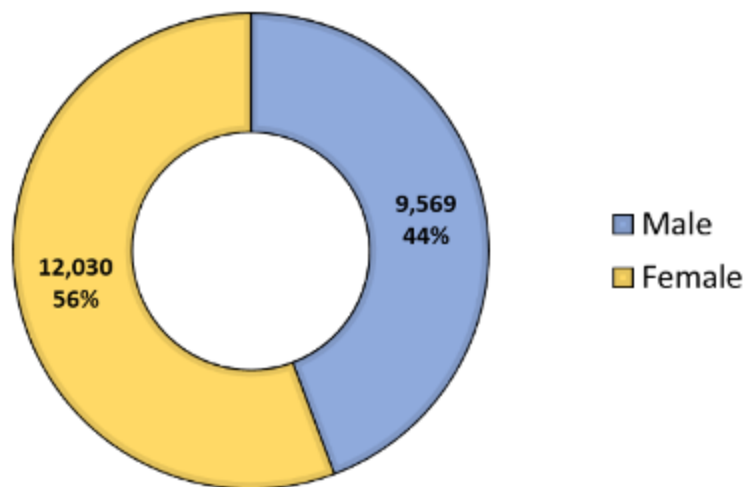


Fig. 1: Baptisms by Gender

From the baptismal records, it is evident that 12,030 (56%) of the baptisms were of females, while 9,569 (44%) were males. Due to damaged or incomplete records, the gender of 178 people remains unknown and is excluded from these statistics. In terms of freedom status at the time of baptism, 8,807 (65%) were free, and 4,789 (35%) were enslaved. There are 8,180 entries where the condition of servitude is unknown, but based on a close examination of the records, it is likely that most of these people were free.

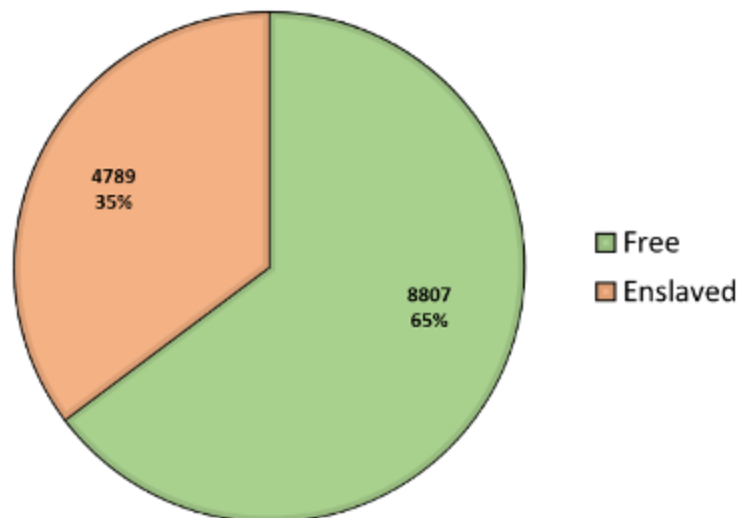


Fig. 2: Condition of Servitude at Baptism

The dataset categorizes people into eight skin color/race categories as noted in the parish registers: Negro/Black (6,181); Sambo (684); Mulatto (5,448); Quadroon (3,794); Mestee (1,147); Legally White (121); Brown (57); and Persons of Color (753). In 3,591 cases, the skin color or race was not specified or is ambiguous due to incomplete information, typically because only the mother—usually a non-white person—was mentioned, making it difficult to determine how society would have classified the person based on skin color. These categories reflect the rigid racial classifications in colonial Jamaica, which were heavily based on parentage.

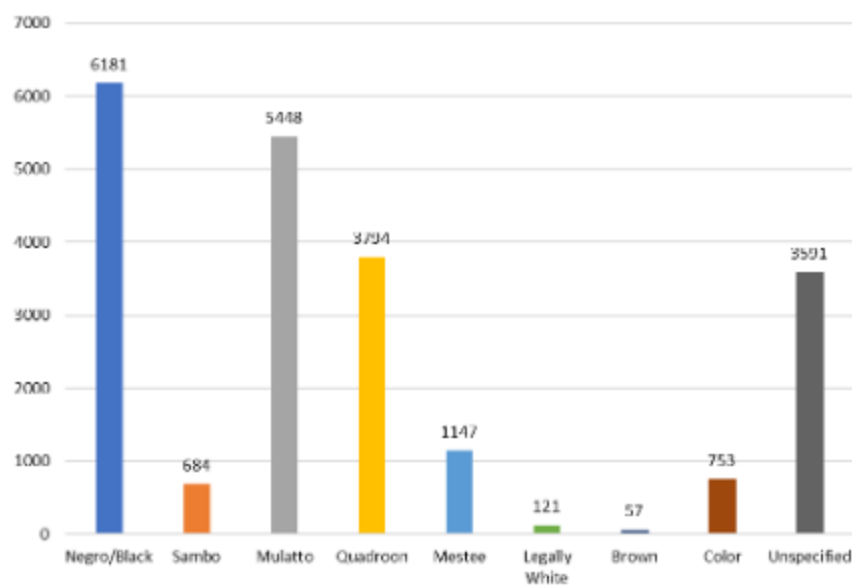


Fig. 3: Skin Color/Race (All Categories)

The “Legally White” category includes people identified in the register as Mustifino, Quintroon, or Octoroon. Under a 1733 Jamaican law, the offspring of a white person and a Mestee (who had one white and one Quadroon parent) were considered legally white and free.⁴ Bryan Edwards, a contemporary observer, noted, “In Jamaica, and I believe in the rest of the Sugar Islands, the descendants of Negroes by white people, entitled by birth to all rights and liberties of white subjects in the full extent such as are above three steps removed in lineal digression from the Negro Venter.”⁵ This law is occasionally referenced directly in the parish registers, with annotations such as: “according to the legislature of the Island are deemed white people and immunities the same,”⁶ or “deemed white by Law & immunities according,”⁷ or “These are deemed white by Law.”⁸ Although only 121 people are identified as “Legally White,” it is likely that

⁴ Daniel Livesay, *Children of Uncertain Fortune: Mixed-Race Jamaicans in Britain and the Atlantic Family, 1733-1833* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2018), 167.

⁵ Bryan Edwards, *The History, Civil and Commercial, of the British Colonies in the West Indies*, vol. 2, book 4 (London: J. Stockdale, 1794), 17.

⁶ Hanover Copy Register: Baptisms, Marriages, Burials, Registrar General’s Department, Spanish Town, Jamaica, 82.

⁷ Ibid., 83.

⁸ Ibid., 87.

many more individuals of mixed descent were present in the parish registers without direct reference.

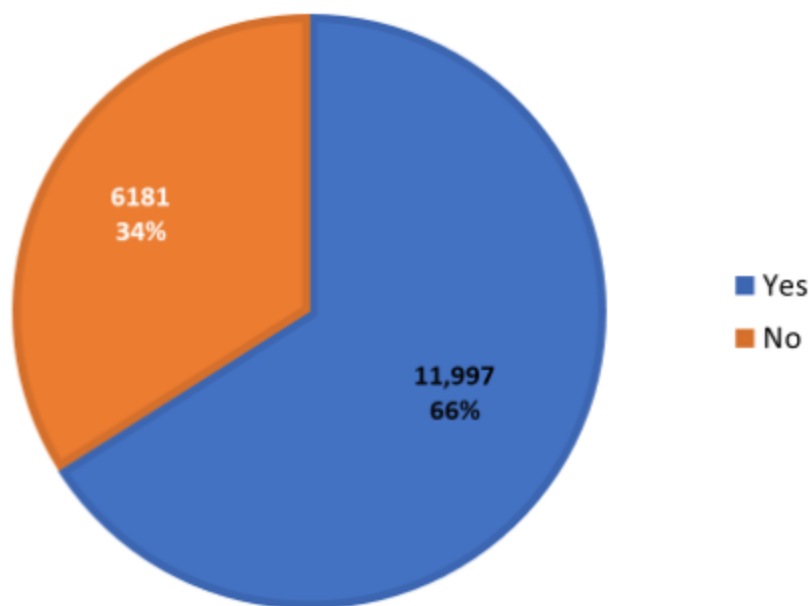


Fig. 4: Percentage Considered to Have White Ancestry

Among the 18,178 entries where skin color or race is less ambiguous, 11,997 (66%) of people had some form of white ancestry, while 6,181 (34%) were classified as “Negro” or “Black,” indicating no white ancestry. Notably, 5,448 of those with white ancestry were classified as “Mulatto,” meaning they had supposedly equal white and African heritage. Additionally, 5,062 people were categorized as Quadroon, Mestee, or Legally White, indicating that a significant portion of the baptized population had more European than African ancestry. So-called Sambo people, who were the offspring of a Negro and a Mulatto parent, considered three-fourths African, constituted only 684 entries, a rather paltry 4% of the entries where the skin color or race was known.

Although missionaries targeted enslaved people for conversion, these statistics suggest that Anglicanism in Jamaica was not widely accepted among enslaved Black people. Moreover, the majority of people of African descent baptized in the Church of England were free people who were either of equal European and African ancestry or had predominantly European heritage. This dataset, therefore, contributes valuable insights into the racial and social dynamics of Anglicanism in colonial Jamaica, highlighting that the Church of England’s non-white congregants were predominantly free and light-skinned people.

The dataset will be valuable to a diverse range of scholars, genealogists, and educators. Historians specializing in the Atlantic World, Caribbean studies, and the history of slavery will find the dataset particularly useful for exploring the lived experiences of people of African

descent in colonial Jamaica, particularly in relation to their participation in the Anglican Church. The dataset allows researchers to analyze the social dynamics of baptism as a religious and legal act, revealing patterns of race, status, and ancestry that are crucial for understanding the complex hierarchy of colonial society.

Genealogists and family historians will also benefit from this dataset, especially those tracing ancestry in the Caribbean. The inclusion of names, dates, and parental information provides essential links for constructing family trees and understanding the historical context of their ancestors' lives. Furthermore, the dataset's detailed records on skin color/race and freedom status offer insights into the social identities and legal conditions of individuals, which can help descendants understand how their ancestors navigated the complexities of race and freedom in a slave society.

This dataset opens up numerous avenues for future research. Scholars might investigate the role of religion in the process of social mobility among people of African descent in colonial Jamaica, particularly how baptism might have been used as a tool for negotiating freedom or improving social status. Additionally, researchers could explore the implications of racial categorization in the parish records, examining how these classifications influenced the lived experiences of non-white people. Indeed, approximately 180 people in the registries are referred to as "Maroon Negroes" indicating that Anglican Christianity may have played a role in disparate maroon communities in the second half of the eighteenth century. The dataset could also be used to study the regional differences within Jamaica, comparing how various parishes recorded and treated baptisms of people of African descent, which might reflect broader social and economic conditions in those areas. Finally, this dataset could inform studies on the legacy of Anglicanism in Jamaica, contributing to broader discussions on the long-term impact of colonial religious practices on post-emancipation Caribbean society.

Dates of Data Collection

2024

Dataset Languages

English

Geographic Coverage

Jamaica

Temporal Coverage

1669-1800

Document Types

Sacramental or Religious Registry

Sources

Registrar General's Department, Spanish Town, Jamaica

- Clarendon, Copy Register: Baptisms, Marriages, Burials, Vol. 1
- Hanover Copy Register: Baptisms, Marriages, Burials
- Kingston, Copy Register: Baptisms, Vols. 1-2
- Port Royal, Copy Register: Baptisms, Marriages, Burials, Vol. 1
- St. Andrew, Copy Register: Baptisms, Marriages, Burials, Vol. 1
- St. Ann, Copy Register: Baptisms, Marriages, Burials, Vol. 1
- St. Catherine, Copy Register: Baptisms, Marriages, Burials, Vols. 1-2
- St. David, Copy Register: Baptisms, Marriages, Burials
- St. Dorothy, Copy Register: Baptisms, Marriages, Burials, Vol. 1
- St. Elizabeth, Copy Register: Baptisms, Marriages, Burials, Vol. 1
- St. James, Copy Register: Baptisms, Marriages, Burials, Vol. 1
- St. John, Copy Register: Baptisms, Marriages, Burials, Vol. 1
- St. Mary, Copy Register: Baptisms, Marriages, Burials, Vol. 1
- St. Thomas in the East, Copy Register: Baptisms, Marriages, Burials, Vol. 1
- Trelawny, Copy Register: Baptisms, Marriages, Burials, Vol. 1
- Vere, Copy Register: Baptisms, Marriages, Burials, Vol. 1
- Westmoreland, Copy Register: Baptisms, Marriages, Burials, Vol. 1

Also available on FamilySearch, <https://www.familysearch.org/search/collection/1827268>

Methodology

To create the dataset, I accessed these digitized parish registries through *Family Search*. I sifted through close to 150,000 individual entries spread across 2,476 pages in the nineteen baptismal registries and systematically transcribed all entries that specifically mentioned non-white individuals of African descent. This transcription process involved careful reading and interpretation of the original handwriting, which varied in clarity and legibility, and recording them in a spreadsheet. Approximately eighty-three records involving indigenous people from across the Americas were not included in this dataset, as the focus is on those of African ancestry.

The resulting dataset contains 21,776 entries of non-white people, both free and enslaved, who were baptized in the Anglican Church in Jamaica during this period. Each entry in the dataset includes fifteen categories: the date of the baptism; last name(s); first name(s); a verbatim transcription of the registry entry (including physical descriptions and parentage); age at baptism; gender; condition of servitude at the time of baptism; skin color/race; indications of white ancestry; parish of baptism; colony; the name of the enslaver, if applicable; a notes section for additional information; a concise source citation with volume and page numbers; and a comprehensive citation.

The design of the spreadsheet was carefully considered to maximize usability and facilitate future research. Each column was created to capture specific details that are essential for understanding the social and legal status of the individuals baptized, their familial relationships, and their connections to the broader colonial society. The decision to include both a short source citation and a longer Chicago citation ensures that the dataset is both user-friendly and academically rigorous, providing all necessary information for researchers to trace the original source material. Furthermore, the header row for each category can be filtered for greater accessibility to find information.

Date of Publication

December 2024

Data Links

Project Website: www.religionandslavery.org

Dataset Repository: Harvard Dataverse, <https://doi.org/10.7910/DVN/YNB3AA>

Linked Data Representation: Enslaved.org

Cite this Article

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