

The apprenticeship system – summary

[Sociology](#), [Slavery](#)



THE APPRENTICESHIP SYSTEM Aims of apprenticeship * To provide a peaceful transition from slavery to freedom * To guarantee planters an adequate supply of labour during the period and prepare for full freedom * To train apprentices for freedom especially working for wages * To enable the colonial governments to revise the system of justice and establish institutions suitable for a free society. The SMs were retired naval and army officers on half pay, appointed from Britain who were accustomed to rough conditions and enforcing discipline.

They were chosen because they were not connected to the planter class and it was felt that they would not be biased. Duties of stipendiary magistrates * To supervise the apprenticeship system * To settle disputes between masters and apprentices * To visit estates at regular intervals and hold court * To inspect jailhouses and workhouses * To assist in fixing the value of negroes who wanted to buy their freedom These duties were strenuous and led to the death of many SMs who were not accustomed to tropical conditions and could not afford the high cost of medical treatment.

Conditions of employment Salary - ? 300 for the first year then increased to ? 450 for travel expenses and housing. There was no pension for dependents if the SM died in service. There was no sick leave and he had to pay his own fare back home if he was dismissed or out of service. These bad working conditions prevented SMs from performing their duties satisfactorily and many were easily bribed by planters. They were also overburdened by work because they were so few in numbers. Those who tried to do their duties were sometimes persecuted.

They were abused physically, verbally and via the press. They were all obstructed in the performance of their duties as planters sometimes refused to allow them on the estates. Success of stipendiary magistrates * They listened to complaints from both sides and acted as a buffer between masters and apprentices. * They informed apprentices of their rights, they did not have to listen to gossip or obtain information from newspapers. * They helped apprentices to organise their lives better by giving advice.

However, they had very little to formulate schemes to improve the social conditions of the apprentices. They were unable to prevent apprentices from being punished harshly. Punishments Apprentices were usually sent to the workhouse, however SMs had no control over what happened there. The most common form of punishment in the workhouse was the treadmill. There was also the whipping post and apprentices could be put in penal gangs. Females often had their heads shaved. Time lost in the workhouse had to be repaid by the apprentice by working for his master during his free time.

Controlling apprentices on the estates * It was illegal for apprentices to leave the estate without written permission. * Valuations on able-bodied slaves were often inflated. * High fees were charged for the use of the markets and for licences to work off the estates as carpenters, blacksmiths and so on. These licences and tickets to sell in the markets could be withdrawn. * Planters refused to give customary allowances. * Planters found faults with apprentices' work, which had to be done over in the apprentices' free time. Apprentices were locked up on false charges which would often be dropped before the arrival of the SM. * Apprentices' fruit trees would be cut down and

they were forbidden to own livestock. * The 40 1/2 hours per week were spread over five days instead of four. *

Low wages would be paid; unfair deductions from wages would be made; and the wages were generally paid late. The End of Apprenticeship Apprenticeship ended for ALL apprentices in 1838 because: * The system was not achieving its aims. * The antislavery society exposed the abuses in the system and began to campaign for full freedom. The planters feared violence if domestic apprentices were freed before field apprentices. * Some planters felt that it was cheaper not to have to provide for apprentices and only to employ the number of labourers they needed. Note: Antigua granted full freedom to its slaves. The planters decided against apprenticeship. The apprenticeship system came to an end in 1838 when the colonial governments in each colony voted against its continuation.
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