

Source I: Excerpt from Richard Ligon's book, *The True and Exact History of the Island of Barbados*, published in England in 1657

Background: Richard Ligon spent three years living on Barbados, and he wrote a vivid account of life on the West Indian island when he returned to England. How does he characterize the treatment of servants and their living conditions?

As for the usage of the Servants, it is much as the Master is, merciful or cruel; Those that are merciful, treat their Servants well, both in their meat, drink, and lodging, and give them such work, as is not unfit for Christians to do. But if the Masters be cruel, the Servants have very wearisome and miserable lives. Upon the arrival of any ship, that brings servants to the Island, the Planters go aboard; and having bought such of them as they like, send them with a guide to his Plantation; and being come, commands them instantly to make their Cabins, which they not knowing how to do, are to be advised by other of their servants, that are their Seniors; but, if they be churlish, and will not show them, or if there are not enough materials to make the Cabins, then they are to lie on the ground that night. These Cabins are to be made of sticks, branches, and Plantain leaves, under some little shade that may keep the rain off. Their suppers might be a few Potatoes for meat, and water or Mobbie [sweet potato liquor] for drink.

The next day they are rung out with a Bell to work, at six o'clock in the morning, with a severe Overseer to command them, until the Bell ring again, which is at eleven o'clock; and then they return, and they are set to dinner, either with a mess of Loblolly

[cornmeal mush] or Potatoes. At one o'clock, they are rung out again to the field, there to work until six, and then come again, to a supper of the same. And if it chance to rain, and wet them through, they have no extra shirt, but must lie so all night. If they take off their clothes, the cold of the night will strike into them; and if they are not strong men, this ill lodging will put them into a sickness: if they complain, they are beaten by the Overseer; if they resist, their time is doubled.

I have seen an Overseer beat a Servant with a cane about the head, till the blood has followed, for a fault that is not worth speaking of; and yet he must have patience, or worse will follow. Truly, I have seen such cruelty there done to Servants, as I did not think one Christian could have done to another.