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The Hispanic American Historical Review, Vol. 49, No. 4 (Nov., 1969), 656-678.

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Manumission, *Manumisos*, and *Aprendizaje* in Republican Venezuela

JOHN V. LOMBARDI*

DURING THE VENEZUELAN wars for independence, both royalists and patriots competed for the support of Negro slaves and deceived them with promises of liberty¹. Bolívar, like many other caudillos of both bands, published decree after decree offering freedom to all slaves who would help expel the Spaniard. Indeed, so many of these decrees appeared that in 1818 he declared that slavery no longer existed in Venezuela. Unfortunately for the enslaved black man, however, Venezuelan hacendados would not accept this fiat.²

As the threat of Spanish reconquest receded, civilian slave holders in Venezuela grew more impatient at the military policy of slave conscription. In extreme emergencies they had let their workers be confiscated, but with the danger past they would countenance no meddling with the sacred right of property. During the height of the wars for independence, military chieftains of all ranks had disposed of slave property as they pleased, but this short-term libertarianism ended in 1819 when the Congress of Angostura undertook to reconstruct slavery in Venezuela.

Responding to the general dissatisfaction, the Congress rejected Bolívar's plea for ratification of his abolition policy.³ Of course, the delegates agreed, slavery was a nasty business, and by right slaves should be free, but Negro slaves were an exceedingly nasty group whose inclusion in society was hardly advisable. Such underdeveloped people, they believed, would need years of careful education before they would be fit for freedom. Thus the Angostura delegates proposed to improve the moral state of the enslaved Negro through carefully planned laws which would gradually prepare him for liberty.⁴

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¹ The research in Venezuela for this article was made possible by a Fulbright-Hayes Fellowship (1966) and a Fundación Creole Grant (1967).

² For a more detailed discussion of republican slave policy see my "Esclavos en la legislación republicana de Venezuela," *Boletín Histórico* (Caracas), No. 13 (January 1967), 43-67.

³ R. A. Rondón Márquez, *La esclavitud en Venezuela* (Caracas, 1954), 41.

⁴ The preamble and text of the Angostura law are most revealing of the fears

To certify their liberalism and humanitarianism, the delegates declared that no man might own any other, proclaimed to the world that Venezuela would abolish slavery within a fixed term, and announced that freedom would be made dependent on the slaves' own efforts. Those slaves already free would remain so, and those called to serve in the armed forces would also acquire their freedom. The ban on slave imports, instituted in 1811, remained in force.⁵

Although the Angostura decree established a number of principles that were to appear in subsequent slave laws, it did not accurately reflect Venezuelan slave philosophy, primarily because it had no legal force.⁶ In fact, the Angostura debates were merely a dress rehearsal for the main event at Cúcuta a year later. The 1821 Cúcuta slave law was the first and most important piece of legislation in the republican reconstruction of Negro slavery after the wars for independence. Since all subsequent slave laws were either modifications of the 1821 law or based on it, this statement of slave philosophy is worth an extended analysis.⁷

The heart of the law was the provision for free birth of all slave children.⁸ In fact, this short article is the only reason that the 1821 law can be considered an abolition decree. Slavery, in theory at least, was doomed, and any curious mathematician could easily figure out when the end would come. But such a grim outlook was tempered somewhat by other sections of the law. Since a slave master was required to raise and feed the freeborn children of his human chattel, the slave child or *manumiso* must pay for his maintenance by serving his mother's master for eighteen years. Of course, the child was a freeman, although until he reached eighteen he must work for his patrón. In return, the patrón supposedly educated the child so that he would be prepared to take on the responsibilities of a Venezuelan citizen.⁹

But the wisdom of the Cúcuta legislators went even farther. At eighteen this freeborn child, now legally quit of any obligation to his patrón and ready to enter the world of the free, would be presented

and rationalizations of the delegates. *Correo del Orinoco*, No. 51, February 5, 1820.

⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷ For the text of the 1821 Cúcuta law see *Cuerpo de leyes de la república de Colombia* (Caracas, 1961), 31-32. All citations of this law are from this source.

⁸ Art. 1°. "Serán libres los hijos de las esclavas que nazcan desde el día de la publicación de esta ley en las capitales de provincia, y como tales se inscribirán sus nombres en los registros cívicos de las municipalidades y en los libros parroquiales."

⁹ See Art. ii.

to a local committee with an account of his conduct. The gentlemen of the committee, after careful consideration, would see to the future occupation of the new citizen.¹⁰ Such philanthropy was not confined to the freeborn, but included the perpetually enslaved as well. The gradual end of slavery in Venezuela was the purpose of this law, and thus some system of manumission must be devised.¹¹ But how to reconcile the sacred right of all men to liberty with the equally sacred right of private property? This was, indeed, a dilemma for men firmly steeped in the theories of liberalism so much in vogue at the time.

Their solution took the form of an exceedingly clever manumission system concerned primarily with payment for all slaves freed by the state. The law set up a local fund, composed of various taxes on inheritances, to free deserving slaves.¹² Those eligible for this grace were chosen by the same local committee that supervised manumissions. Appointed by the governor under the august name Junta de Manumisión, this group included the first judge, the parish priest, two citizens, and a responsible treasurer. These worthies collected the tax, chose the most honorable and industrious slaves for manumission, and paid the masters for the slaves freed. Once a year, with appropriate ceremony, the elect slaves received their certificates of freedom.¹³ Having established the junta, the delegates also forbade the selling of nonpubescent children to a different province from their parents, ratified the 1811 decree ending the slave trade, and confirmed the liberty of all slaves who had acquired freedom under the various republican governments.¹⁴

Although the 1821 manumission law provided the machinery of slave policy, it worked rather badly. From the day of publication until slavery was legally abolished in 1854, myriad questions of interpretation and administration streamed into the Department of the Interior from local officials.¹⁵ The difficulties of administration were

¹⁰ See Art. iv.

¹¹ See the third *considerando* of the 1821 law in which the Cúcuta delegates proclaimed the gradual freedom of slaves without endangering public tranquility or hurting the slave owner's property rights.

¹² The taxes on inheritances were established in Art. viii. These were modified somewhat in 1827 and again in 1830.

¹³ See Arts. vii through xiv.

¹⁴ See Arts. v, vii, xv.

¹⁵ An easy way to glimpse the administrative confusion caused by the laws is through the collection of resolutions relating to manumission and slavery emitted between 1830 and 1846 in *Colección completa de las leyes, decretos y resoluciones vijentes sobre manumisión, expedidas por el Congreso constituyente de la república y gobierno supremo de Venezuela, desde 1830 hasta 1846* (Caracas, 1846). See also the outstanding essay on the Colombian period by Harold A.

so great that practically no part of the law became effective, except that providing for the free birth of slave children.

The administrative chaos resulted in various reorganizations of the new slave system, beginning with Bolívar's detailed decree of 1827. This decree left the structure of manumission procedures unchanged, but it reflected extreme solicitude for the right of property.¹⁶ The 1821 law had proved ineffective as an instrument of gradual abolition; and slaves must be paid for before they could be freed. The obvious solution was to tighten up tax collection and administration.¹⁷ Lest anyone suspect the government of more interest in taxes than in slaves, Bolívar also included various admonitions to slave owners. Twenty-nine lashes, for example, were enough correction. Slaves should be allowed to change masters at will, and slave owners must feed, clothe, and house their property.¹⁸ Yet this intricate system with its involved financial organization also failed in spite of Bolívar's reforms; and after the dissolution of Gran Colombia it was revised by the Venezuelan Congress of Valencia.

One of the first Colombian laws reviewed at Valencia was the 1821 manumission law. While following the Cúcuta formula very closely, the congress devised a new law in 1830 that made two major changes. First, if born after 1830, the freeborn children of slaves would have to serve their mother's master until the age of twenty-one instead of eighteen. Second, the government would subsidize the manumission program so as to guarantee the freedom of at least twenty slaves annually.¹⁹

It is clear, then, that the legal mechanism of slave policy was fully established between 1821 and 1830. The curious part of this system is the complete lack of substantial modifications over the years. In 1848 a new slave law was passed which was virtually identical to the 1830 law, word for word.²⁰

The only exception to this official inertia came in 1839, when the

Bierck, "The Struggle for Abolition in Gran Colombia," *HAHR*, XXXIII (August 1953), 365-386. The failure of the manumission policy in all its incarnations was admitted by almost everyone. For a running account of failure see the *Memorias* of the Secretario del Interior y Justicia for the years 1831 to 1854.

¹⁶ For the text of Bolívar's decree see *Decretos del Libertador* (Caracas, 1961), II, 345-352.

¹⁷ For a good example of the impossible tax system see the records of Valencia's Junta de Manumisión for the years 1821-1827. *Archivo General de la Nación*, Gran Colombia—Intendencia de Venezuela, L, 336-362.

¹⁸ See Art. x.

¹⁹ For the text of the 1830 manumission law see *Colección completa*, 1-6.

²⁰ The text of the 1848 variation on the manumission law can be found in the *Gaceta de Venezuela*, No. 913, May 7, 1848.

government bestirred itself to regulate the lives of those manumisos who would reach the age of legal freedom in that year. Since Article six of the 1830 slave law gave the government power to look after the freed men, once they were released from their obligation to serve their mother's master, the president, General José Antonio Páez, issued a decree controlling their conduct.²¹ Rather than allow these freeborn Venezuelans to do as they pleased, work where they liked, or live where they wanted, the government restricted them to the same kind of job in the same place where they had grown up. Every manumiso who came of age was to be contracted, preferably to his mother's master, until he was twenty-five years old. If there were reasons why he should not be so contracted, then he must find another person willing to buy his services. If the manumiso had free and legitimate ascendants, he could be released to their care, but the requirement of legitimacy made this escape unlikely.²² Should the manumiso break his contract, local police had the power to return him to the patrón.

Although the reorganized republican slave system of 1821 and 1830 doomed servile labor in Venezuela and provided various mechanisms to hasten its end, slaves soon discovered the weakness of the law's principal administrative arm. In theory the juntas de manumisión collected death dues, selected slaves to be freed, and paid the owners. Unfortunately these poorly organized and impotent committees met infrequently, collected few taxes, and freed a small number of slaves.²³ To be sure, the Department of the Interior had the last word on slave matters; but the Congress of 1821 as well as those of 1830 and 1848 were predisposed towards local administration of local problems and left the regulation of slavery in local hands. This unfortunate decision practically nullified the manumission law.

In order to understand the failure of the manumission system, one must have a clear idea of the various interests involved. No one after 1830 seriously attempted to justify slavery as either a positive or even a relative good. No one could be found to insist that slavery was ordained by God.²⁴ Venezuelans believed that liberty, acquired at such a high cost during the wars for independence, should not be stained by human servitude. But they could not ignore the existence

²¹ See *Colección completa*, 26-28.

²² The characteristically low level of marriages among Venezuelan slaves can be amply seen in the extraordinary series of *padrones* conserved in the *Archivo Arquidiocesano* of Caracas in the Sección Parroquias.

²³ From the very beginning of the manumission program some individuals saw that it would never succeed. See Mosquera, *Memoria*, 22-24.

²⁴ The last impassioned defense of slavery occurred in 1824 in a long article in *El Observador Caraqueño*, No. 4, January 22, 1824.

of some 40,000 slaves,²⁵ nor could they abolish the odious institution. Why? The sacred right of property would be seriously affected, since the state could not pay for so many chattels. Slave owners who had lost many slaves in the war, whose haciendas and *hatos* were seriously damaged by marauding troops, and who suffered from heavy debts and usurious interest rates were in no mood to give up their remaining slave property.²⁶ But since political and military necessity had forced the government to accept the principle of manumission, their only recourse against the new law was delay and obstruction.

The government was naturally concerned with self-preservation and the party in power with self-perpetuation. While sincerely concerned with the slave owners' well-being, the politicians worried more about the possibilities of slave revolts. While they did not expect a spontaneous uprising of the oppressed black man, they did fear the political potential of adequately led rebellions espousing the cause of Negro freedom. To keep control, all governments from 1821 to 1854 sponsored the policy of gradual but effective manumission of slaves.²⁷

This conflict of interest, albeit rather simply stated, is clearly demonstrated in the actions of the two groups throughout this era. Regardless of party affiliation, the various efforts on behalf of manumission are practically indistinguishable. Each Secretary of the Interior sent a succession of directives to local officials and juntas de manumisión in a futile effort to make the gradual abolition of Negro slavery a reality. Year after year they pleaded with the Congress for money to free slaves, for better laws to make manumission effective, or for clarification of confusing sections in the old law. It made no difference whether the administration was Liberal or Conservative; the imminence of revolution seemed to spur all governments to greater efforts on behalf of the slaves. At the same time, slave owners, in or out of government, had no intention of sacrificing their property in the interest of political stability. With admirable consistency they resisted every effort to organize an efficient manumission program and fought every interpretation or decision by a local junta that

²⁵ As far as can be determined, there were perhaps 40,000 slaves in Venezuela. This guess is based on the statistics published yearly by Interior y Justicia in their *Memoria* plus the official census of 1844 in *Int. y Just.*, 1846, *Memoria*.

²⁶ The article in *El Observador Caraqueño*, No. 4, January 22, 1824, gives a very good indication of the Venezuelan farmers' reaction to manumission and abolition.

²⁷ Perhaps the best guide to Venezuelan government views on manumission and slavery is the collection of *Memorias* of the Department of the Interior from 1831 to 1854.

threatened to take their slaves or their slaves' children. This dichotomy of forces in the struggle over manumission prevailed until the passage of the abolition law in 1854.

As the conflict evolved, it became evident that both sides had tacitly accepted a set of rules governing their dispute. Both agreed to base it on the manumission system established in 1821 and revised in 1830. The government issued no decrees fundamentally changing the manumission system, and the slave holders paid what taxes they could not avoid. But on the one hand the property owner felt free to obstruct or influence the junta, to avoid or delay paying death dues, to appeal every decision in slave matters, and to complicate manumission through prolonged litigation. On the other hand, the government used its power to decide on petitions against junta decisions, to order juntas to operate, to veto modifications of the law, and to influence the juntas. Any attempt by one side or the other to alter the rules met defeat until conditions had changed sufficiently to permit abolition in 1854. The slave, as the object of the controversy, had little or no influence on the operation of manumission. His contribution was limited to the passive resistance characteristic of forced labor. What little public opinion existed was equally ineffectual, alternating between pious denunciations of slavery and ringing defenses of private property.

In light of this conflict between slave owners and government, it is easy to see the importance of the junta de manumisión. If the government could not contemplate expropriation without prior payment²⁸ and if the slave owners could not contemplate a complete return to colonial slavery, the action had to be played out within the rules of the manumission system. Although the slave owners staged a number of major campaigns to revise the whole program of manumission, none was successful, and the battle eventually degenerated into a long series of guerrilla actions around the administration, interpretation, and evasion of the manumission law. Mainly because the juntas were local bodies, the slave owners managed to cow most of them, so that the government was hard put to get its decisions enforced over the enormous pressure and resources of local citizens.²⁹ The best perspective, then, on this test of wills is furnished by the junta de manumisión, its operation and its failure.

²⁸ After all, "loable es la intención de libertar al esclavo, pero es sagrado el deber de pagarle al dueño. . . ." *Gaceta de Venezuela*, No. 223, April 18, 1835.

²⁹ Perhaps the best example of juntas combining with slave owners against the government occurred in Ocumare de la Costa over the interpretation of the aprendizaje decree. *AGN, Int. y Just.*, CCLVI (1842), 7-34. See also *Gaceta de Venezuela*, No. 875, August 22, 1847.

In the minds of Colombian legislators at Cúcuta, the junta de manumisión was to be all things to all men. Although in theory slavery was as good as abolished, an impressive number of black Venezuelans would remain slaves until the beneficent effects of the philanthropic manumission law could take effect. The junta was devised as a temporary local institution to oversee the liquidation of slavery in Venezuela. Not only was it charged with administering the apparatus of manumission, but it was also expected to regulate and control the moribund slave system as well.³⁰

The key to the role and efficiency of the junta lies with its members and organization. On their shoulders lay the responsibility for carrying out the duties discussed above.

A peculiarity of the system was the way the juntas were formed. The governor of a province appointed the members of local juntas under the laws of 1821 and of 1830-1848. There was no pay for the many difficult, sometimes disagreeable services which they performed. For that reason the legislators provided that the first civil magistrate of each canton, along with the highest ranking local priest, should always form the nucleus of the group, which was filled out by a couple of respectable citizens and a responsible secretary-treasurer.³¹

There was often difficulty getting the juntas together. Not only were the respectable citizens reluctant to take up their duties, but they had the habit of leaving town before meetings or forgetting about them altogether.³² Even with all other members present nothing could be done without the secretary-treasurer. In the first place, the meeting could not be officially recorded without him. Secondly, because the main business of the meeting was the collection and disbursement of funds, nothing could be accomplished without the man responsible for all the money. Since there was no reward for attendance at the meetings or penalty for absenteeism, discipline was impossible.³³

³⁰ See *Materiales para el estudio de la cuestión agraria en Venezuela (1800-1830)* (Caracas, 1964), I, 289-291, especially Arts. ix, x, xi, and xii. The Venezuelan congresses of 1830 and 1848 kept much the same junta system. *Colección completa*, 1-6, Arts. xv, xvi, and xvii; and *Gaceta de Venezuela*, No. 913, May 7, 1848, same articles.

³¹ See note 30 above.

³² See for example *Colección completa*, 54. Not only was absenteeism a problem, but the juntas were hard to form in the first place. *Int. y Just.*, 1839, *Memoria*, 11-15, and *El Republicano*, No. 6, June 27, 1844.

³³ Unfortunately almost none of the records of the juntas de manumisión between 1830 and 1854 has reached the national archives, most probably because they were considered municipal or at best provincial documents. Nonetheless, a good number of records for the 1821-1827 manumission program are available. Since the 1821-1827 manumission system operated about as badly and with much

The composition of the junta endangered its objectivity, for by and large the most respectable citizens turned out to own many slaves. Furthermore, the presence of a Church representative was hardly conducive to impartiality, since the extinction of slavery was bound to reduce the labor force on the various *obras pías* sublet or administered by the Church and to threaten the large amounts put out in *censos píos* with slaves as collateral.³⁴

As if these obstacles to the proper functioning of the manumission system were not enough, there was the controversy over paperwork. Who paid for paper, pens, ink, copies of laws, and the like? It would certainly be asking too much to expect the unpaid secretary-treasurer to supply his own materials. But by law the money collected for the purpose of manumission could not be used for anything else. Obviously the juntas could not function correctly or even efficiently until this problem was settled. After much confusion and delay the Department of the Interior decided that these costs should be borne by the presiding officer.³⁵

Two other officials directly concerned with manumission were the *comisionado* and the *síndico municipal*. The first official, appointed by the local junta, kept track of the dead and dying whose estates would have to pay taxes to the manumission fund. The job was probably not very hard, since only a small number of people with estates died annually in any parish. Judging by the lack of complaints about *comisionados*, they probably performed their small task well.³⁶ The *síndico municipal* had no official connection with the junta, however, except as the legal defender of slaves and manumisos. The efficiency

the same problems as the 1830-1854 program, it is safe to draw certain conclusions about the later period from the manumission records of the earlier. Furthermore, the problems resolved by the Department of the Interior relating to secretary-treasurer difficulties bear out this assumption. For some examples of the 1821-1827 junta records see the following expedientes in AGN, Gran Col.—Int. de Ven., L, 336-362; XCII, 237-240; LXXIX, 181-206; LVI, 334-345; CXCIV, 74-107; CLXV, 516-525. See also Int. y Just., 1831, *Memoria*, 81-85; 1834, *Memoria*, 37-38; 1839, *Memoria*, 11-15; *Colección completa*, 29-30; Int. y Just., 1841, *Memoria*, 32-33; *Colección completa*, 54.

³⁴ See Antonio Leocadio Guzmán's demagogic denunciation of property interests controlling the juntas de manumisión in Int. y Just., 1849, *Memoria*, 19-21. The Church's interest in slavery is hard to document specifically without recourse to the extensive section in the *Archivo Arquidiocesano de Caracas* relating to *obras pías* and *censos*. Nevertheless, a good indication of religion's slaveholding can be seen in the debates over the reduction of *censos* which occurred soon after abolition in 1854. *Diario de Debates*, Senado, No. 66, May 2, 1855; No. 67, May 3, 1855; No. 68, May 3, 1855; No. 69, May 4, 1855.

³⁵ See the *Memorias* and resolutions cited in note 33 above.

³⁶ In any case, the juntas were hard pressed to collect taxes on those estates reported by the *comisionados*. For the duties of the *comisionado* see the manumission laws of 1821, 1830, and 1848 cited above.

and dedication of the *síndico* depended almost entirely on his independence from the local slave owners. Evidently few independent *síndicos* denounced abuses and fixed responsibility, a shortcoming which became increasingly evident after 1840, when the *aprendizaje* system went into effect. Supposedly the *síndico* represented the manumiso being contracted and insured that the price and conditions were fair. Yet although many abuses of the manumission and *aprendizaje* systems were denounced to the government, very few denunciations were the work of zealous *síndicos*.³⁷

Throughout the long, dreary history of the *juntas de manumisión* hundreds of problems arose about the application of the law—how to tax property left to a soul or how to determine the age of a slave whose birth certificate had been lost, and many others. Since few local *juntas* had the courage to decide any of these questions, they were usually sent to the *junta superior* and from there to the Department of the Interior. It is indicative of the sloppiness of the system and the tenacity of the slave owners that the same *consultas* were made time and again, although the first decision by the Department of the Interior was publicized in the *Gaceta de Venezuela*.³⁸ This constant questioning and answering, of course, formed another tactic of delay fully exploited by slave owners. No progress could occur in the gradual abolition of slavery until these questions were settled.

Such were the men and the institutions to whom were delegated the awesome task of eliminating slavery from Venezuela. While many of the reasons for their failure stem from the organization of the system described above, other reasons can be found in the inadequacy of the instruments provided by law.

The weakest link in the entire manumission program was the system of inheritance taxes intended to create a manumission fund. Even had these taxes been collected assiduously and promptly, they

³⁷ Antonio Leocadio Guzmán's *Memoria* (Int. y Just., 1849, 19-21) accuses the majority of *síndicos* of being property owners and often slave owners. Although there is little evidence to prove the *síndicos* crusaders for slave and manumiso rights, there are indications that some of them did help slaves. See for example, *AGN*, Int. y Just., LXIV (1833), 193-197. Some people, however, felt the *síndicos* could be doing better; *Informe de la comisión de mejoras dirigido a la honorable Diputación de Caracas en su décima nova reunión* (Caracas, 1849), 15-16. Then there is the extraordinary case of the *síndico* who defended a slave servant's right to change masters because she, as a good Catholic, felt she could not possibly live in the same house as her master, a Jew. The *síndico* felt proud of this defense of religious freedom and denounced those who charged him with anti-Semitism. After all, he pointed out, some of his best friends were Jews. *El Liberal*, No. 125, May 3, 1838.

³⁸ This is best seen in the collection of resolutions published in 1846, *Colección completa*.

would probably have only begun to free Venezuela's slaves.³⁹ But collecting taxes proved to be one of the junta's least efficient operations. From 1830 to 1854 only some nine hundred slaves received their freedom thanks to the manumission fund, an average of only twenty-five a year.⁴⁰ Nonetheless, as noted above, no one was able to change the system.⁴¹

The poorly constructed collection procedures used by the juntas enabled many debtors to avoid the tax entirely or else to defer payment almost indefinitely. The most useful stratagem employed was simple delay—failure to appear when cited by the junta to pay or explain lack of payment. This, of course, was only a temporizing gesture, but some stubborn individuals managed to stretch it out over ten or fifteen years, hoping that something might happen meanwhile to eliminate any need to pay.⁴²

Even after the debtor had been compelled to appear by threat of court action, many conditions might arise to prevent payment of the tax. Perhaps the estate was in litigation, in which case there would be no payment until the legal problems were solved.⁴³ Or it could happen that the inheritance took the form of property leased to third parties, so that payment of the tax would have to wait until the lease lapsed and the property could be sold.⁴⁴ The debtor might also contend that the inherited estate had changed value since the junta had assessed the tax and should therefore be reevaluated, thus postponing payment some time longer.⁴⁵

More philanthropic debtors to the manumission fund proposed paying their tax by manumitting enough slaves to take care of the

³⁹ The impossibility that the manumission tax would ever be sufficient to eliminate slavery from Venezuela before death did the job is evident from the debates over the abolition law of 1854. See *Diario de Debates*, Nos. 7, 8, 10, 17, and 22, March 4, 1854 to March 16, 1854.

⁴⁰ For the total number of slaves and manumisos freed see *Int. y Just.*, 1842-1847, 1850, 1853, *Memoria*.

⁴¹ The official charged with manumission in the Department of the Interior was more sanguine than most public officials when he reported that as of 1843 the manumission law had been complied with satisfactorily, since a little over twenty slaves had been freed each year. *AGN*, *Int. y Just.*, CCXCI (1843), 122-127. However, most other officials thought differently. See for example *AGN*, *Int. y Just.*, CCXCI (1843), 119-121; CLXXX (1838), 101-112; CLXXX (1838), 84-92; CXCV (1839), 51; and the *Memorias* of Interior y Justicia, 1831 to 1854.

⁴² Perhaps the best collection of information on delinquent debtors is the group of expedientes concerning the funds owed since 1828. Some of the cases ran from 1828 to 1847 before they were settled. *AGN*, *Int. y Just.*, XLIX (1832), 266-279, 284-295, 307-326; LI (1832), 249-265; LXXXVIII (1834), 391-397, 406-506; CLXI (1837), 324-333.

⁴³ *Al Público* (Caracas, 1845) and *Colección completa*, 30.

⁴⁴ *AGN*, *Gran Col.—Int. de Ven.*, CXCI (1824), 332.

⁴⁵ *AGN*, *Int. y Just.*, LXV (1833), 403-424.

amount. Although the effect of this procedure was much the same as if the junta had collected the money, it had the advantage of letting the hacendado choose the slaves whom he would free.⁴⁶ Although there is little direct evidence, one suspects that many hacendados freed old or injured slaves whom they would have had trouble selling and thereby received both a tax credit plus a citation for philanthropy.⁴⁷

But it is not fair to blame the failure of the manumission system on the unpaid and overburdened juntas. After all, they had almost no coercive power and in any case were so busy after 1840 with the apprenticeship program that they had time for little else. These problems, together with the infrequent meetings of the juntas, lead one to marvel that they managed to free the minimal two or three slaves in each province every year.⁴⁸

But with the infinitesimal sums collected the juntas had to free some slaves. The selection of the favored few caused no serious problems. The 1821 law had provided only for the selection of the most honorable and industrious slaves,⁴⁹ a situation not much to the liking of the slave owners, since these were also the best workers. This criterion lasted only until 1827, however, when Bolívar decreed a new and more detailed standard for selection. First preference went to the slaves from the estate paying the tax, beginning with the oldest. Second came the most industrious and honorable slaves in the canton, also by age. If all the slaves in one province should be freed before the money ran out, the excess funds would go to the Dirección de Manumisión for disbursement to other provinces.⁵⁰ This revision of standards probably took some of the sting out of the strict tax payment rules included in Bolívar's decree.⁵¹ But when the Venezuelan reaction of 1830 came, the tax enforcement was dropped, while the

⁴⁶ *AGN*, Gran. Col.—Int. de Ven., CXXIII (1822), 246; Int. y Just., CCCLIV (1847), 28-34. The government warned that such slaves should be of "edad proveya," *Colección completa*, 59.

⁴⁷ The settlement of two estates in 1848 showed a list of slaves freed in payment of the tax. Of the fourteen slaves liberated, ten were either over sixty or suffered from some injury or disease that made them worth less than the legal price. *Gaceta de Venezuela*, No. 947, February 11, 1849. For the legal tariff of slaves see *Colección completa*, 65.

⁴⁸ From the available statistics it appears that 934 slaves were freed by funds collected under the manumission program, while some 289 other slaves received their liberty in their master's wills to help cancel the tax. Int. y Just., 1842-1847, 1850, 1853, *Memoria*.

⁴⁹ *Materiales para*, I, 289-291.

⁵⁰ *Decretos del Libertador*, II, 345-352, Arts. vii and ix.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, Arts. i, ii, iii, iv, v, and vii.

selection standards remained.⁵² Venezuelan slave owners got the best of both laws.

It is not clear exactly how the local juntas went about choosing the privileged few slaves to be freed by the manumission funds. Many times the tiny sums available reduced the possibility to almost nothing. For this reason juntas gladly freed old slaves or those for whom their masters were willing to take less than the standard price.⁵³ A number of slaves petitioned the junta to be selected for annual manumission, but the juntas never took them into consideration.⁵⁴

Another difficult problem was posed by slaves over sixty-three years. Since the oldest slave on the tariff was sixty-three years old and worth five pesos, the juntas wondered if they could free all slaves over sixty-three without paying anything. Since a slave's value was nil after sixty-three years, were not all such people automatically free? The government, with visions of ancient and indigent ex-slaves wandering around helplessly, decided that no slave could be freed without payment of at least five pesos, no matter how old. It also promised to ask Congress for a new law on the subject.⁵⁵

By and large the selection process did not cause as much litigation and delay as was involved in tax collection. Still, a few slave owners complained that the junta did not pay enough for their confiscated property.⁵⁶ The pressure of the tax and the threat of slave expropriation drove many slave owners to take advantage of Paragraph 3, Article x of the 1830-1848 law.⁵⁷ In their wills they freed some slaves and with their value canceled the tax due the manumission fund.

⁵² *Colección completa*, 1-6. The taxes are in Art. x and selection criteria in Art. xx.

⁵³ See the *Acuerdos* of the junta de manumisión of Guanare (1822-1827), *AGN*, Gran Col.—Int. de Ven., LVI, 334-345; and those of Nutrias (1822-1827), LXXIX, 181-206, for some examples of this sort of transaction. An even clearer indication of the ages of slaves freed under the manumission system can be seen in some of the reports from cantons and provinces listing freedmen, their ages, and their values. Although incomplete, these records show very clearly that the slaves freed by manumission probably were around fifty years old or had some infirmity that made them worth as much as a fifty-year old slave. See *Gaceta de Venezuela*, No. 438, June 9, 1839; No. 546, June 27, 1841; No. 552, August 9, 1841; and No. 916, May 28, 1848.

⁵⁴ For examples of the petitions submitted see *AGN*, Gran Col.—Int. de Ven., CXCIX (1824), 52; and Int. y Just., CDXI (1849), 258-259.

⁵⁵ The expediente began in 1838 and was not finally resolved until 1844. The Department of the Interior forbade freeing old slaves without providing them with maintenance and denied that any slave could ever be automatically free whatever his age. Int. y Just., 1844, *Memoria*, 60. See also Int. y Just., 1845, *Memoria*, 77-78, and *AGN*, Int. y Just., CLXXI (1838), 260-276.

⁵⁶ *Colección completa*, 62-64.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 1-6, Art. x. *Gaceta de Venezuela*, No. 913, May 7, 1848, Art. x.

Although the records are by no means complete, perhaps some two hundred slaves were freed by this means.⁵⁸

Since only about nine hundred slaves ever received their freedom through the selection and payment mechanism administered by the junta de manumisión it is hardly worthwhile to try to track down each problem that arose.⁵⁹ The junta did just what had been planned: freed old slaves, provided a small escape valve, and proved to the world by its very existence that Venezuela was a philanthropic, liberal-minded republic.⁶⁰

Under Páez' apprenticeship decree of 1840 the junta de manumisión took on a new role. Although it was plagued by the problem of personnel and expenses, its efforts on behalf of the free slave eighteen or twenty-one years old belied the inefficiency of the manumission procedures. Statistics on *aprendizaje* are reliable and regularly compiled. The reason for this increased efficiency is not difficult to divine. The manumission system failed because of the conflict between the interests of slave owners and government; the *aprendizaje* scheme achieved considerable success precisely because these two groups had much the same interests. Both wanted the freeborn child of slaves to fit into the existing social structure as a docile and industrious worker. Both wanted to see him in a fixed employment. What conflict existed generally arose over the extent to which these principles should be carried out in practice.

According to the 1821 law of manumission, the child of slaves, although born free, could not exercise any part of this freedom until he reached eighteen years of age.⁶¹ The reactionary Congress of 1830 extended the period to twenty-one years in the interests of good morality.⁶² Lest anyone mistake the freeborn child for a free man, a new term was invented to classify this semi-servile group; they were

⁵⁸ Unfortunately, there are no records of ages or values of slaves freed under this clause, so no estimation of average ages can be made. Evidently the Department of the Interior doubted the philanthropy of some heirs, for they required the junta to either see the freed slaves in person or else get legal certification of the slave's actual freedom before allowing the heirs a tax credit. *Colección completa*, 9, *Gaceta de Venezuela*, No. 234, July 4, 1835, and *Int. y Just.*, 1854, *Memoria*, 87-88.

⁵⁹ Although the statistics on manumission are poor, the nine hundred figure is reasonably close. The publication of manumission figures could only redound to the credit of the official who sent them in.

⁶⁰ The self-congratulatory smugness of some Venezuelans where slavery was concerned can be seen in *El Observador Caraqueño*, No. 4, January 22, 1824, and *Correo de Caracas*, No. 7, February 20, 1839. The *Memoria* of Interior y Justicia of 1850 (p. 18-20) leaves no doubt about the escape valve function of manumission.

⁶¹ *Materiales para*, 1-6, Art. ii.

⁶² *Colección completa*, 1-6, Art. ii.

to be known as manumisos. During the eighteen or twenty-one years in which a manumiso served his mother's master, he toiled to pay back the costs of his upbringing. After all, reasoned the legislators, it was hardly just to deprive slave owners of their property rights over their slaves' children, and then expect them to raise and train the children free of charge. The theory, of course, envisioned solicitous slave owners educating manumisos to prepare them for the responsibilities of citizenship.⁶³

In spite of legalisms and semantic distinctions manumisos lived much the same as slaves. The main difference was that the manumiso's term as a slave ended legally at age eighteen or twenty-one. Although technically a manumiso could not be sold, since he was a free man, his services were for sale. This rather fine distinction fooled no one, and interested parties from the government on down bought and sold manumisos as they did slaves.⁶⁴ Of course a manumiso or his services brought considerably less than the services of a slave; in fact, the official tariff stipulated that a manumiso was worth half a slave of the same age.⁶⁵ As with slaves, manumisos fled their masters and had to be hunted down and returned.⁶⁶

A manumiso might hope to escape servitude before reaching legal age, for the legislators in their overriding concern for morality and the family provided that a manumiso's legitimate and free ascendants or elder brothers and sisters could take him out of servitude, providing they paid the master.⁶⁷ This undoubtedly affected few manumisos, for the incidence of legitimate births was extremely low among slaves. Furthermore, even if the liberto (freed slave) were legitimate, he was not likely to have the requisite sum to free his enslaved relations.⁶⁸

⁶³ See the considerandos of the 1821 and 1830 laws cited in notes 61 and 62 above.

⁶⁴ Evidence of the sale of manumisos or of their services abounds, ranging from newspaper ads to official government documents. *Colección completa*, 34; *El Liberal*, No. 217, June 23, 1840; *El Venezolano*, No. 141, November 1, 1842; *Diario de Avisos*, No. 166, August 3, 1850.

⁶⁵ See *Colección completa*, 1-6 (Art. v) and 65.

⁶⁶ See for example the expediente formed by Rafael Diego Mérida who refused to pay the costs of capturing a slave for the capture of his runaway manumiso because the manumiso was not legally a slave. *AGN*, Int. y Just., CLXXXVII (1839), 399-405. See also *Gaceta de Venezuela*, No. 878, September 12, 1847.

⁶⁷ *Colección completa*, 1-6, Arts. iii and v.

⁶⁸ The characteristically low rate of marriages among slaves can easily be seen in the *Padrones* preserved in the *Archivo Arquidiocesano de Caracas*, Sección Parroquias. This is also evident in the population statistics collected in the *Anuario de la Provincia de Caracas in Sociedad Económica de Amigos del País. Memorias y estudios, 1829-1839* (Caracas, 1958), I, 179-391.

By and large, however, the situation of the manumiso posed few problems. He lived and worked as a slave. The difficulty lay in the provisions for his freedom at eighteen or twenty-one. In the early years of Gran Columbia and the Venezuelan republic, few slave masters worried much about the eventual fate of their manumisos, but with the approach of 1839, when the first crop of freeborn slave children would acquire their rights, there was considerable concern. With one voice the owners of manumisos warned of the consequences that would befall Venezuela when the manumisos left the control of their patrones. These eighteen-year-old children, they claimed, would throw off the mantle of good customs and industriousness in which the master had clothed them at no small effort and expense. Grave social changes would result, and Venezuelans would regret their leaders' lack of foresight.⁶⁹ Such a plea did not go unheeded in the councils of government, and the Páez administration soon issued the extraordinary apprenticeship decree of 1840.

Rather than allow manumisos at the age of eighteen or twenty-one to lead their own lives and find their own jobs, the government thought it wise to keep them under surveillance for a while longer. Since lengthening the period of service was prohibited by law, the administration hit on the ingenious idea of changing the manumiso's legal status while leaving his actual condition much the same. So it decreed that when a manumiso finished paying off his master for the cost of his upbringing he must remain in tutelage until his twenty-fifth birthday.⁷⁰

Since at eighteen or twenty-one the manumiso, no longer a semi-slave, got the full exercise of his freedom, the decree instructed the junta de manumisión to let him choose his own master for the remaining years of servitude. Yet to avoid unnecessary changes and to guarantee the preservation of good character traits, the manumiso should be encouraged to choose his old master.⁷¹ The extended period of enforced servitude carried the euphemistic designation of apprenticeship, although the number of manumisos actually assigned to learn a trade were few.⁷² Since "master" connoted slavery, the mas-

⁶⁹ For an example of how some Venezuelan legislators expected to solve this problem see the "Proyecto de patronato en favor de los manumisos," in *La Bandera Nacional*, No. 89, April 9, 1839. The government's veto is in *AGN*, Int. y Just., CLXXXVII (1839), 391-397.

⁷⁰ *Colección completa*, 26-28, Arts. iv, vi, and x.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, Arts. iv and vi.

⁷² That most manumisos were hired as laborers at a small monthly wage can easily be seen in the surviving registers of manumiso contracts in *AGN*, Int. y Just., CCCLXXX (1848), 58-96; CDXXXII (1850), 285-364; CDXXXIII (1850), 344-422; CDXXXIV (1850), 147-234; CDXXXV (1850), 369-435; DVI (1853), 46-109; CXCII (1839), 326-402; CXXIV (1840), 65-136.

ters of apprenticed manumisos were called "patrones." Venezuelan authorities took a good deal of comfort from the thought that the system of *aprendizaje* provided the manumiso with a father substitute who would see to his welfare and his much-discussed morality. Since this morality, of course, rarely took hold without adequate means of coercion, the authorities recommended the *patrones* exercise the duty of correcting their young charges as a father would correct his children.⁷³

Although the manumiso's change in status from an unpaid forced laborer to a paid forced laborer may seem relatively unimportant, the *aprendizaje* system encountered some difficulties. Even though administered considerably better than the related manumission system, *aprendizaje* met with resistance and evasion by owners of manumiso service and by the manumisos themselves. Before tracing this chronicle of deviousness, a detailed knowledge concerning the mechanisms of apprenticeship is necessary.

For the *aprendizaje* of manumisos to take place, accurate birth records had to be available. To this end the parish priests sent a register of all manumisos to the local *juntas*. From these registers the *junta* could tell which manumisos had reached the legal ages of eighteen or twenty-one and should, therefore, be put out in contract. Once the *junta* discovered which manumisos should be contracted, they told the proper owners to present them to the *junta* with a report of conduct.⁷⁴ After the formality of presentation the manumiso was contracted to his former owner if possible; if not, he might find another *patrón* of means to contract his services. Sometimes a manumiso would have free and legitimate ascendants, in which case he was turned over to them, thus avoiding the onerous apprenticeship.⁷⁵

To prevent frauds and coercion, all contracts involving manumisos were made in the presence of the *junta*, which had the responsibility of seeing that they conformed to local standards. In this as in all similar transactions, the manumiso was not considered capable of representing himself, but was spoken for by the *síndico municipal*.⁷⁶ In case doubt remained about the firmness of the contract, Article ix of the 1840 decree explained that any manumiso leaving the service of his *patrón* would be returned by the police. Objections to police authority would be handled through regular channels. Nor could a

⁷³ See for example the directive from Interior y Justicia stressing the importance of closely supervising manumiso conduct, *Colección completa*, 28-29. The right of punishment is confirmed in *Colección completa*, 36-38.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 26-28, Arts. i, ii, and iii.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, Arts. iv, v, and vi.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, Arts. vii and viii.

manumiso hope to be quit of his patrón before his twenty-fifth year, since the law commanded the juntas to relocate any manumiso whose contract lapsed. Moreover, no one could accept the services of an underage manumiso outside the aprendizaje system.⁷⁷

Such, then, are the outlines of Venezuela's system for moralizing the manumiso population. Obviously designed to keep freeborn children of slaves in servitude a few more years, it worked rather well. Nonetheless, since the possibility always existed that a manumiso might find his way out of his original master's control, clever hacendados devised numerous ways of either circumventing the law altogether or at least of making it work more to their advantage.

Needless to say, failure of presentation appeared to many owners the easiest way of avoiding the law. After all, as we have seen, the juntas met irregularly and their means of compulsion were weak. Furthermore, manumisos rarely knew their rights or how to claim them. The evidence strongly suggests that the masters of manumisos delayed presenting their charges until the last possible moment, with the result that many manumisos remained slaves long past their eighteenth or twenty-first birthday.⁷⁸ Another circumstance aiding chicanery was the absence of parochial birth registers in many towns. Many conscientious masters worriedly asked the juntas how they could know the ages of those manumisos whose birth records no longer existed. No easy solution to this problem appeared; so the Department of the Interior recommended a conference at which the master and his neighbors, with the assistance of the síndico municipal, guessed the age of the manumiso.⁷⁹

Unfortunately this stratagem could not hold off presentation indefinitely, and eventually the reluctant owners presented their charges to the junta for contracting. But rather than waste the years spent training their manumisos in good character traits, many masters assiduously tried to contract their own manumisos. By and large they succeeded, and a large majority of the contracts reaffirmed the old slave-master relationship,⁸⁰ although a certain number of brave manumisos refused to have anything further to do with their masters. The master's paternal feeling toward the ungrateful manumiso was

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, Arts. ix, x, and xi.

⁷⁸ For some examples of presentation problems see the following: *Colección completa*, 34; *El Republicano*, No. 6, June 27, 1844; *Int. y Just.*, 1845; *Memoria*, 78-79; *Gaceta de Venezuela*, No. 917, June 4, 1848; *Informe de la comisión de mejoras*, 5-16.

⁷⁹ For the resolution of a number of birth record problems see: *Colección completa*, 35-36; *Gaceta de Venezuela*, No. 917, June 4, 1848; *AGN, Int. y Just.*, CCCLXXXIII (1847), 210-214; CCCLXXXIII (1848), 4-7.

⁸⁰ See the registers of manumisos contratados cited in note 72 above.

so strong that he often demanded that the contract be made with him anyway. The juntas, defenders of the manumiso's legally consecrated right to choose his patrón, regularly sided with the master and consulted the government. After all, they reasoned, unless the manumiso could present well-founded reasons for choosing another patrón, it would hardly be just to deprive the original master of his services. Warily the Department of the Interior often responded that this problem had been resolved many times before and the resolution published in the *Gaceta*—manumisos could contract with whomever they pleased as long as the patrón was a man of good character and of means.⁸¹

In spite of the patrón's proclaimed concern with establishing a substitute family relationship for the manumiso, he fought any attempt to allow the real parents to take over custody of their child. By first confirming the necessity of legitimacy before a manumiso could be turned over to his parents, the patrones eliminated any serious challenge to their control over most of their charges. Yet even when free and legitimate parents occasionally claimed their child, the master would not give him up without a fight. Arguing that the parents led immoral and irresponsible lives, the patrón would object that the years of solid moral training invested in the manumiso would surely be lost if he went to live with his parents at the tender age of eighteen or twenty-one. Since the law was very clear on the subject, the Department of the Interior time and again ordered the juntas to resist the demands of patrones and turn manumisos of age over to their free and legitimate parents.⁸²

Once patrón and manumiso agreed on a contract, another sort of battle began. This one was usually between master and servant with government officials as the final court and the instrument of coercion. Obviously the patrón wanted to pay the servant as little as possible

⁸¹ For examples of this long series of resolutions see: Int. y Just., 1844, *Memoria*, 61; *Gaceta de Venezuela*, No. 917, June 4, 1848. However, the Department of the Interior started out requiring the manumiso to give good reasons why he should not be contracted to his former master, *Colección completa*, 48. See also the expediente with the report by a síndico municipal that manumisos were being coerced into contracting their services to their former master. *AGN*, Int. y Just., CCXLIII (1841), 183-195.

⁸² For some examples of this controversy see: *AGN*, Int. y Just., CCXXXIII (1841), 438-445; CCLVI (1842), 1-45; *Colección completa*, 41-43; *Gaceta de Venezuela*, No. 655, August 6, 1843. The Department of the Interior gave in on one point when it decided natural mothers could not claim their children, *AGN*, Int. y Just., CCCLII (1847), 179-193. The owners of manumisos tried another dodge by seeking to require that manumisos be contracted only to the same kind of work they did before legal age, *AGN*, Int. y Just., CCLXXIV (1843), 212-226.

and make him work as hard as possible; the contracted manumiso wanted the opposite. Some patrones saw that if payment were withheld until the end of the contract, discipline would be improved, and the manumiso might be less likely to run away. Manumisos did not view the question in this light, and so the decisive local juntas avoided all responsibility by forwarding the dispute to the central government. In justification of their practice patrones alleged that by holding back all or part of the salary due their forced laborers, they contributed to the manumiso's welfare. By this well-intentioned practice the masters, in effect, saved the salary so that the manumiso would have a small capital to start his own enterprise once the contract ended. The Department of the Interior decided that such kindness could not be permitted, since the manumisos had contracted at a certain price per month; if they were not paid, they could not be considered to have contracted their services freely.⁸³

The manumisos also managed to avoid work. Some took to the hills, since they knew the contract could last only until their twenty-fifth year. Although the police chased and caught them, their patrones could not prevent repeated escape. But they tried. They had the junta pass a query to the government, asking if a patrón might extend the contract past twenty-five years to make up for time lost while his manumiso ran away. The government refused to permit this. By and large, however, contracted manumisos were limited to the same few weapons as the slaves—passive resistance, flight, laziness, or extreme obnoxiousness.⁸⁴

The legal status of the contracted manumiso closely resembled that of the slave. Although guaranteed a salary of twelve to twenty-four pesos a year, he had few rights to call his own. Not only must he obey his patrón's commands, but he had no freedom to choose his residence or order his life.⁸⁵ At no time before his twenty-fifth birthday, for example, could he marry without permission. If he was al-

⁸³ *Colección completa*, 36. Patrones of manumisos were firm believers in withholding salaries. They included such a provision in their proposal for an apprenticeship law, *La Bandera Nacional*, No. 89, April 9, 1839, especially Art. v.

⁸⁴ *El Venezolano*, No. 104, April 12, 1842; *Int. y Just.*, 1844, *Memoria*, 61; *Colección completa*, 67; *Gaceta de Venezuela*, No. 878, September 12, 1847.

⁸⁵ The salary received by manumisos contratados varied with the type of work and the locality. The range of twelve to twenty-four pesos a year is from the registers of contracts cited in note 72 above. Few patrones took their role as parent substitutes very seriously. The Department of the Interior had to caution them that they were required to feed, clothe, and provide medical care for their manumisos free of charge. Evidently some patrones deducted the costs from the small salary, thus acquiring a debt peón. *Int. y Just.*, 1845, *Memoria*, 80-81, *AGN*, *Int. y Just.*, CCCVII (1844), 1-14.

lowed to marry, the conditions of his contract were revised without his consent to conform to the status of his spouse.⁸⁶ In all this he remained, of course, a free man—so free that in most cases his services could be willed to his patrón's heirs.⁸⁷

It would be unfair not to recognize the shades of treatment that separated a contracted manumiso from a slave, or from a free peón. A slave belonged to an estate and was frequently considered as much a part of the establishment as the houses or coffee trees. The contracted manumiso was not part of an establishment, although he or his services were inheritable.⁸⁸ This practice obeyed the legalistic distinction between the slave as human chattel and the contracted manumiso as a free man whose services were owned. The Department of the Interior struggled hard to impress this distinction on the contractors of manumisos with indifferent results. Contracted manumisos, for example, could not be rented out or subcontracted as were many slaves, because such a practice would eliminate the beneficial effects expected from the manumiso's education by a single individual.⁸⁹

Aside from the relatively superficial differences between the slave, the manumiso, and the free peón, one quality of their relationship to the master appears crucial in determining the attitudes of Venezuelan employers—permanence. Obviously the slave was the most permanent worker of all. He belonged to his employer. His master might pay him, give him special privileges, or rent him.⁹⁰ But as long as he remained a slave his destiny was his master's will. Next in the scale of permanence were the manumisos and the contracted manumisos. Protected somewhat by the special manumission and *aprendizaje* laws, their subservience to the master was less than complete. Furthermore, they could look forward to the end of their formal obligation at their twenty-fifth birthday. Still, except for these limitations, the manumiso was as good as a slave. The least permanent member of the Venezuelan work force was the peón or *jornalero*. Legally free and theoretically master of his destiny, the peón sold his labor to the highest bidder. But there were limitations on his freedom devised by desperate hacendados unable to hold him

⁸⁶ *El Venezolano*, No. 85, December 21, 1841.

⁸⁷ *Colección completa*, 57-58; *Int. y Just.*, 1845, *Memoria*, 77.

⁸⁸ See the sources cited in note 87 above and *Gaceta de Venezuela*, No. 871, July 25, 1847.

⁸⁹ *Colección completa*, 48; *Int. y Just.*, 1845, *Memoria*, 77.

⁹⁰ For evidence of paid slaves see the accounts of the Hacienda Chuao, *AGN*, *Int. y Just.*, CDXII (1849), 270. Evidence of slave rentals can be seen in *AGN*, *Int. y Just.*, XLVI (1832), 244-261.

to the land.⁹¹ The peón had to register with the local judge and carry a booklet certifying his status. Upon accepting work—and all must work or be considered vagrants—the peón surrendered his booklet to his employer, who returned it when the peón paid his debts and ended his period of work. Without the book, no peón could be given a job, and any jornalero caught on the roads without his book would be thrown in jail until his employer could be located.⁹²

Fortunately for slaves, manumisos, and peones, actual practice rarely conformed to legal theory. Heavy investments in coffee required many hands for maintenance and especially harvest.⁹³ Competition for laborers was lively, and the strict peonage laws operated badly or not at all. Many peones, playing on the needs of hacendados, collected bonuses or advances at one hacienda only to appear at the neighboring hacienda soon afterward to claim a new bonus. Employers complained, but as long as their fellows would accept peones without the proper papers, the police regulations could not have any effect.⁹⁴ Slaves and manumisos, too, had their stratagems. Some manumisos made themselves so much disliked and useless that their patronos gave up and let them roam about unmolested.⁹⁵ Others fled their masters, probably presenting themselves as peones in another canton or province. Some undoubtedly joined the *cumbes* and bandit raiding parties infesting Venezuela during this period. Many slaves, of course, took to the hills or passed themselves off as free Negroes in other cantons. Some were even accepted as free laborers by needy employers who well knew their slave status.⁹⁶ A few tried slave re-

⁹¹ Representations by hacendados on this subject are legion. See for example *El Eco Popular*, Nos. 5 and 6, March 3 and 10, 1840; *El Venezolano*, No. 104, April 12, 1842; *El Liberal*, No. 583, January 31, 1846; Carabobo, 1847, *Exposición que dirige a la honorable Diputación de la provincia de Carabobo sobre los diversos ramos de la administración municipal, el gobernador* (Valencia, 1847), 3.

⁹² This restrictive but rarely effective legislation is collected in the *Reglamentos de policía* issued by the various provinces of Venezuela. Sections relative to Jornaleros, Peones, y Esclavos are selected and published in Fernando Ignacio Parra Aranguren, *Antecedentes del derecho del trabajo en Venezuela, 1830-1928* (Maracaibo, 1965), 283-464.

⁹³ *El Liberal*, No. 205, March 31, 1840; No. 366, July 19, 1842; *El Observador*, No. 65, March 31, 1844.

⁹⁴ *El Venezolano*, No. 85, December 21, 1841; No. 151, January 3, 1843; *El Observador*, No. 65, March 31, 1844; *El Republicano*, No. 57, June 11, 1845.

⁹⁵ *Colección completa*, 48; Int. y Just., 1844, *Memoria*, 61; *Colección completa*, 67.

⁹⁶ See for example the complaints of runaways infesting the hills and causing trouble *AGN*, Int. y Just., CXVII (1835), 304-308. See also the complaint that runaway slaves were being employed knowingly, *AGN*, Int. y Just., CLXIX (1838), 154-159.

bellions, generally without success.⁹⁷ Many more joined various political revolts whose leaders let it be know that freedom could be acquired as in the independence movement.⁹⁸ It is likely that these possibilities of escape made masters, patrones, and employers slightly more considerate. Nevertheless, in republican Venezuela there is little doubt of who commanded.

⁹⁷ Some examples of slave disturbances can be seen in *AGN*, Int. y Just., L (1832), 487-578; CXCVII (1839), 112-125; Carabobo, 1845, *Exposición que dirige a la honorable Diputación de la provincia de Carabobo sobre varios ramos de la administración municipal, el gobernador en 1845* (Valencia, [1845]), 2. Venezuelans were prone to imagine rebellions where none existed, thus keeping everyone in turmoil. See for example *AGN*, Int. y Just., CCXLVIII (1842), 79-86; CCCXCI (1848), 347-369; CD (1849), 122-154; CDLXXII (1852), 344-347.

⁹⁸ See for example *El Liberal*, No. 615, September 12, 1846; No. 617, September 26, 1846.