

Crossing the Threshold from Adolescence to Adulthood in Eighteenth-Century Puerto Rico: The Baptismal Sponsorship of Enslaved Infants in Arecibo, 1735–1772

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Abstract This study examines godparent selection patterns by the parents of 632 slaves baptized in Arecibo, Puerto Rico, from 1735 to 1772. The article broadens our understanding of baptismal sponsorship by using family reconstitution to re-create demographic patterns of behavior, including age and marital status, associated with godparenthood. Data regarding the godparents revealed considerable diversity in age, but most were under the age of 30. Godparents generally sponsored only one child of a slave parent or parents. There is a correlation between baptismal sponsorship and marriage. Godparents, especially women, often married within three years of the first time they were selected as baptismal sponsors. Serving as a godparent for a child born to at least one slave parent prepared adolescents for adult responsibilities. In agreeing to accept the spiritual and moral obligations associated with godparenthood, females demonstrated the ability to parent children, whereas males asserted their readiness to provide for a family.

On May 17, 1751, an infant named Felipa was baptized in San Felipe Apóstol Catholic Church in Arecibo, Puerto Rico. Felipa was the fourth child born to Juliana, an unmarried slave mother who belonged to Miguel de Quiñones. Gabriel Francisco de Medina and Polonia Rodríguez, both of whom were free, stood as the infant's godparents.¹ Choosing a godparent required careful consideration. In the event of an accident, illness, or the death of one or both parents, the godparents or the owner was responsible for the spiritual guidance and material well-being of the child. About five months later, on October 5, Polonia again served as a godmother. This time she sponsored Mateo, the son of a freedwoman named Petrona Molina. On this occasion, Polonia was paired

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1. “Libro tercero de bautismos,” Arecibo, 1749–64, Archivo Parroquial San Felipe de Arecibo (hereafter cited as APSFA), fol. 40v.

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with Manuel Serrano, another local free resident.² It was not uncommon for free white members of the community to serve as godparents, also known as baptismal sponsors, for children born to slaves or former slaves. They often did so as a way of enhancing their prominence or esteem in the community. Slaves and former slaves probably sought to avail themselves of the sponsors' influence, wealth, and status. Baptismal sponsorship served a cohesive and integrative function in the community by reaffirming solidarity or forging connections through webs of patronage and clientage.³

Until recently, our knowledge of godparenthood among enslaved and free populations in colonial Latin America was limited to the information contained in baptismal registers about the person who was baptized and that person's parents, sponsors, and witnesses: name, age, marital status, ethnic and racial designations, and in articulo mortis (in danger of death) baptism.⁴ Free godparents were preferred because they might provide the infant with an advocate or an intercessor between master and slave in times of conflict between the two. However, only a few owners sponsored infants born to their slaves, and most such cases happened in the nineteenth century.⁵ Interestingly, even the relatives of owners rarely sponsored the children of those owners' slaves.⁶ Ana Maria Lugão Rios argues that another reason why slaves may have chosen free godparents was that they "could not represent themselves legally nor conduct commercial transactions." Given the close ties that sponsorship created between

2. "Libro tercero de bautismos," Arecibo, 1749–64, APSFA, fol. 51v.

3. See Blank, "Patrons, Clients, and Kin," 262; Charney, "Implications of Godparental Ties," 295; Hanger, *Bounded Lives*, 90; Higgins, "Licentious Liberty," 133–44; Lauderdale Graham, *Caetana Says No*, 45–46; Haas, "Il Mio Buono Compare," 347.

4. For works that discuss godparent selection in the context of race and legal status in colonial Latin America, see Gudeman and Schwartz, "Cleansing Original Sin," 35–38; Schwartz, *Sugar Plantations*, 153–94; Schwartz, *Slaves, Peasants, and Rebels*, 137–60; Ramos, "Community, Control and Acculturation"; Góes, *O cativo imperfeito*; Pérez, "'Saludos from Your Comadre'"; Stark, "Ties That Bind"; Wheat, *Atlantic Africa*; Gerbner, *Christian Slavery*.

5. A number of scholars have argued that masters would have sought to avoid having free and unfree people participate together in a religious ceremony that marked the spiritual equality of all individuals. See Gudeman and Schwartz, "Cleansing Original Sin," 41. See also Schwartz, *Slaves, Peasants, and Rebels*, 142; Higgins, "Licentious Liberty," 131; Ingersoll, *Mammon and Manon*, 113; Lauderdale Graham, *Caetana Says No*, 46.

6. In contrast, in Spanish Florida and Louisiana, masters or members of their families commonly served as godparents for their slaves. See Hanger, *Bounded Lives*, 106; Landers, *Black Society*, 121. For this practice in nineteenth-century Brazil, see Schwartz, *Slaves, Peasants, and Rebels*, 154–55.

godparents and parents, it made sense for a slave to ask a free person to be a godparent to their child.⁷

While the historiography affords an invaluable glimpse of godparenthood from the slave's perspective, it does not address the practice from the point of view of godparents. One way to learn more about what it meant to serve as a godparent for an infant born to slave parents is to examine demographic patterns of behavior associated with godparenthood. Through the methodology of family reconstitution, scholars can reconstruct the ages and marital status of godparents.⁸ To determine the ages of godparents, one must locate their baptismal record; marital status can be discerned from marriage records. This is a difficult and time-consuming methodology, which explains why the experience of godparents has not been studied for colonial Latin America.⁹ This methodology reveals that Gabriel Francisco, Polonia, and Manuel were 21, 15, and 23 years old, respectively, when chosen as godparents in the instances above. Gabriel Francisco and Polonia were serving as godparents for the first time, and Manuel was serving as a godparent for the fourth time.¹⁰ There were no apparent kinship ties between the godparents and these two infants' mothers or slave owners.¹¹ Family reconstitution also revealed that all these godparents married shortly after serving as baptismal sponsors. Gabriel Francisco married six months later, and Polonia and Manuel married each other fifteen months later.¹² This data prompts two questions: Why would young, unmarried people such as Gabriel Francisco, Polonia, and Manuel take on the spiritual and potential economic obligations associated with godparenthood for infants with whom they had no biological relationship? And was there a connection between serving as a godparent and marriage?

The answers to these questions are hard to come by. Baptismal registers did not record the thoughts and motivations of those who participated in the

7. Rios, "Politics of Kinship," 295.

8. I use parish registers in much the same way that Mariza Soares, Jane Landers, Paul E. Lovejoy, and Andrew McMichael used ecclesiastical records in their analysis. See Soares et al., "Slavery in Ecclesiastical Archives."

9. Stark, "Ties That Bind," discusses other demographic aspects of godparenthood for infants born to at least one slave parent.

10. "Libro segundo de bautismos," Arcibo, 1735-49, APSFA, fol. 7v; "Libro primero de bautismos," Arcibo, 1708-35, APSFA, fols. 150v, 163v. Manuel also served as a godfather on January 11, 1750; May 31, 1750; and October 1, 1750. In each of these cases, he sponsored infants born to at least one freed parent. See "Libro segundo de bautismos," Arcibo, 1735-49, APSFA, fols. 13v, 21v, 28r.

11. Using parish baptismal, marriage, and death registers from Arcibo, I reconstituted the community's population for the period 1708-91.

12. "Libro primero de matrimonios," Arcibo, 1708-60, APSFA, fols. 138v, 144r.

ceremony. Research on godparents for infants born to a slave parent has long focused on why they were selected. Young godparents were probably chosen with an eye toward the future, in the event that a parent became ill or died.¹³ As Katharine Gerbner has noted, selecting free or freed godparents also enabled slaves to develop broader social networks beyond the slave owner's property and to establish links of association or ties of kinship with free or freed people.¹⁴

This essay uses family reconstitution to examine godparent selection patterns by the parents of 632 infant slaves baptized in Arecibo, Puerto Rico, from 1735 to 1772. This methodology broadens our understanding of baptismal sponsorship by re-creating demographic patterns, including age and marital status, associated with godparenthood. Although data for the godparents revealed considerable diversity in age, most were under the age of 30. Godparents generally sponsored only one child born to a slave parent. These godparents may also have served as baptismal sponsors for infants born to free parents and thus may have been reluctant to take on the responsibilities associated with spiritual kinship for a slave's child, who would have had fewer resources when a parent died.

My findings also suggest that serving as a godparent in eighteenth-century Arecibo was part of a stepwise transition from adolescence to adulthood. Godparents, especially women, often married within two years of their first selection as baptismal sponsors. Serving as a godparent for a child born to a slave parent prepared an adolescent for adult responsibilities. In agreeing to accept the spiritual and moral obligations associated with godparenthood, females demonstrated the ability to make their own decisions and publicly acknowledged that they were ready for marriage and for parenting. Young, unmarried males may have agreed to serve as a godparent in order to publicly demonstrate that they were no longer adolescents. As males took on religious and social responsibilities, they began to acquire honor and enhance their reputation. When they did so, their community likely viewed them in a new way, as virtuous and honorable members who could take on adult responsibilities, including marriage. However, adolescents did not become adults in one fell swoop; it was a process that occurred over time. This may explain why for some individuals there were longer intervals between selection as a godparent and marriage. When they agreed to become godparents, Gabriel Francisco, Polonia, Manuel, and others like them signaled their readiness to participate in the adult world by assuming the responsibilities that came with membership in the wider community.

13. Bennett, *Africans in Colonial Mexico*, 152.

14. Gerbner, *Christian Slavery*, 74.

I selected the community of Arecibo because it has the largest and most complete series of parish registers in Puerto Rico for a period in the Spanish Caribbean that is one of the least studied.¹⁵ One has to wonder how generalizable the practices surrounding godparenthood in eighteenth-century Arecibo were for other parts of Latin America (or the world). The Catholic Church has specific guidelines for the administration of baptism that all Catholics followed. For example, the wording of the ritual and the regulations about the sacrament's administration were the same everywhere.¹⁶ The church also had universal guidelines about who could serve as a godparent, including minimum age requirements. In addition, a godparent had to be in good standing with the church, which meant that he or she had received the sacraments of penance and communion during the preceding year. While the practices associated with baptism were similar regardless of location, who were selected as godparents differed by region. Understanding what drove godparent selection in eighteenth-century Arecibo requires a closer look at this community's particular dynamics.

Society in Eighteenth-Century Arecibo, Puerto Rico

Microanalysis of communities such as eighteenth-century Arecibo provides a deeper understanding of how people lived in the past. Located along Puerto Rico's northwestern coast, Arecibo is one of the oldest communities on the island. It was settled by Spaniards around 1570.¹⁷ According to Puerto Rico's first official census, which was taken in 1765, it had 3,171 inhabitants: 2,903 (91.5 percent) were free, and 268 (8.5 percent) were enslaved.¹⁸ There was no indigenous population in the community. Landowners in Arecibo at this time focused primarily on providing livestock and foodstuffs for local markets in San Germán and San Juan (located along the island's southwestern and northeastern coast, respectively). They also raised draft animals on *batos* (large open-range ranches) for export to neighboring islands where large-scale agricultural production flourished, especially Jamaica, which was a producer of sugar. In addition, landowners occasionally grew coffee and tobacco or harvested

15. Few works focus on eighteenth-century Puerto Rico, and only a handful address slavery in this period. See López Cantos, *La religiosidad popular*; López Cantos, *Los puertorriqueños*; Ortiz, *Eighteenth-Century Reforms*; Picó, "Esclavos"; Picó, *Al filo del poder*.

16. "Article 1: The Sacrament of Baptism," *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, Holy See, accessed 6 Aug. 2019, www.vatican.va/archive/ccc_css/archive/catechism/p2s2c1a1.htm.

17. For information on the early history of Arecibo, see Cruz Ramírez, *Arecibo*.

18. See O'Reilly, "Memoria," 251.

dyewoods and timber. Legal trade with Spain and Spanish colonies was practically nonexistent for much of the eighteenth century. However, an illegal trade with the British and the Dutch thrived. As Joseph Dorsey notes, “Puerto Rico was the center of international contraband trade in the Caribbean” during the years when the hat economy flourished (1660–1765).¹⁹ Foreign merchants and traders exchanged textiles, iron tools, and slaves for animal products and agricultural commodities. Contraband trade integrated European colonies throughout the Caribbean because ideas as well as goods were exchanged through informal communication networks.²⁰ In this way, the Spanish Caribbean, especially Puerto Rico, was not nearly so marginal in the Atlantic world as was once thought.

The experience of enslaved populations in Puerto Rico was quite different from those of their counterparts in the sugar-producing areas of the Caribbean. Although planters and ranchers in Puerto Rico required large landholdings, they did not need a large enslaved labor force. This is similar to what Philip Morgan and Verene Shepherd observed for cattle pens in Jamaica and what Andrew Sluyter observed for open-range ranches in Barbuda.²¹ Ownership of slaves was common in Arecibo (about 25 percent of the population owned slaves) but was fairly concentrated, among approximately 80 families during the mid-eighteenth century.²² Most owners possessed from one to three adult slaves; the largest unit consisted of at least nineteen slaves.²³ Hatos were dispersed across vast distances, which meant that small pockets of enslaved men and women lived and worked in relative isolation from other small groups of slaves. Thus, slaves interacted more frequently with members of the free

19. Dorsey, *Slave Traffic*, 24.

20. For the informal communication networks that emerged during the eighteenth century, especially among people of African descent, see Scott, *Common Wind*.

21. Morgan, “Slaves and Livestock”; Shepherd, *Livestock, Sugar, and Slavery*, 137–42; Sluyter, *Black Ranching Frontiers*, 123.

22. Stark, “Parish Registers,” 6–8.

23. Not all the enslaved persons identified would have been present in the parish registers at any given moment from 1735 to 1772. Some individuals did not appear in them at all and thus escape detection, particularly single males and females who never married or had no children. Children under the age of ten were not included in the number of slaves for Arecibo that I tabulated since civil authorities did not consider them adults. These estimates represent a minimum number of enslaved adults that an owner might have had over the course of this 37-year period. Slaveholdings were not static; they increased because of purchases, gifts, and procreation and decreased due to sale, bequest, gifts as part of a dowry, and death. Some enslaved persons ran away, some were manumitted, and some purchased their freedom. Owners may have had slightly larger or smaller holdings in any year in this period.

population, mostly the owner's immediate and extended family and any individuals who lived on the property in exchange for providing occasional services. Some of the latter group may have been free blacks or people of mixed race. The scarcity of land and the impoverishment of many island residents tended to blur social distinctions between whites, blacks, and browns, who mixed and mingled freely.

Slaves had greater opportunities to marry and to establish family lives of their own in places like Arecibo, where the hato labor regime was less physically taxing and supervision of the workforce was not as rigid or close. Material conditions of life, including diet, access to provision grounds, and living arrangements, were also better in Arecibo than in other slave societies. This is reflected in the number of births and the proportion of births to married parents among the enslaved population there. From 1735 to 1772, 632 infants were baptized in Arecibo; the annual average was 17 infant baptisms. Of these, 315 infants (49.8 percent) were born to married couples, and 317 (50.2 percent) were born to unmarried mothers.²⁴ Very little research has been done on the proportion of legitimate births among enslaved populations elsewhere in the Americas, but my findings are much higher than what Stuart Schwartz has documented for the Recôncavo parishes in eighteenth-century Brazil or what Douglas Libby and Zephyr Frank have documented for the parish of São José do Rio das Mortes in Minas Gerais, Brazil, from 1780 to 1810.²⁵

Slaves in Arecibo also experienced lower mortality rates than their counterparts in sugar-growing regions. From 1735 to 1772, there were 299 burials of slaves in Arecibo—an annual average of 8.1.²⁶ Overall, the ratio of births to deaths among the enslaved population was 2.1 to 1, which is remarkable compared to sugar plantations like those Richard Dunn studied in Westmoreland, Jamaica, where for the period 1762–1831 he found a ratio of 1 birth for 1.8 deaths.²⁷ Because births in Arecibo outnumbered deaths, the slave population there was self-sustaining and growing, as is evident in the increase from 268 slaves in 1765 to 424 slaves ten years later. There is no information on the life expectancy of enslaved men and women in Arecibo, but it was higher in the hato economy than in sugar-growing areas.

24. "Libro segundo de bautismos," Arecibo, 1735–49, APSFA; "Libro tercero de bautismos," Arecibo, 1749–64, APSFA; "Libro cuarto de bautismos," Arecibo, 1764–72, APSFA.

25. Schwartz, *Sugar Plantations*, 389; Libby and Frank, "Exploring Parish Registers," 231.

26. "Libro primero de defunciones," Arecibo, 1714–67, APSFA; "Libro segundo de defunciones," Arecibo, 1769–91, APSFA. (The death registers do not include data for the time between November 1767 and December 1768.)

27. Dunn, "'Dreadful Idlers,'" 797.

Most slaves in mid-eighteenth-century Arecibo were not born in Africa; several generations or more had passed since their forebearers had arrived in the Americas. Only 42 African-born slaves were baptized from 1735 to 1772, an annual average of 1.1. It is difficult to specify the ethnic origins of the African slaves who were imported to Puerto Rico in this period. From the sixteenth century on, most slaves came from the coastal region of West Africa, especially the area from the Senegal River to the Gulf of Guinea, although many came from the interior of the continent, including the Congo and Angola.²⁸ Because Arecibo's enslaved population was mostly native born, newly arrived Africans would have found it difficult to create a community in which they could continue to engage in their own spiritual practices or religious beliefs. Creolization rather than African retention was the likely outcome.

Catholicism was the official religion of Puerto Rico. A majority of island residents attended mass (albeit irregularly), even though many had to travel 12 to 16 miles to get to the church, a round trip of four hours or more.²⁹ Parishioners received religious instruction after mass on Sunday and on holy days.³⁰ When Bishop Sebastián Lorenzo Pizarro made a pastoral visit to Arecibo on January 17, 1729, he noted that boys aged 4 to 12 and girls aged 4 to 10 should be instructed in "Christian doctrine that conforms to the Roman catechism," as should "mulattoes, blacks, Indians, slaves, and other people who provide service."³¹ It appears that the priests of Puerto Rico adhered to the bishop's instructions because in the 1760s Bishop Mariano Martí marveled that although the majority of the island's inhabitants were illiterate, they could recite the basic prayers, the Articles of Faith, the Ten Commandments, and the names of the sacraments.³² This conforms to what we know about baroque Catholicism and performative piety in this period; the faithful performed and recited their prayers correctly but probably did so, as Brian Larkin has posited, "out of cultural habit ingrained within them at an unconscious (embodied) level."³³ Parishioners learned their prayers and the rudiments of the faith at a young age, and the sermons they heard at mass on Sundays and holy days reinforced the tenets of faith and precepts of the church.

Reception of the sacraments, especially baptism, was the norm in eighteenth-century Puerto Rico, even among the enslaved population. One

28. For the African slave trade to Puerto Rico in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, see Stark, "New Look at the African Slave Trade."

29. Campo Lacasa, *Historia de la iglesia*, 137.

30. See Morales Muñoz, "Visita del obispo," 137.

31. Morales Muñoz, "Primera visita pastoral," 213.

32. López Cantos, *Los puertorriqueños*, 18.

33. Larkin, *Very Nature of God*, 10.

must wonder whether slaves were baptized voluntarily. Indirect evidence suggests that some, at least, were. Of the 556 slave deaths recorded in Arecibo from 1714 to 1791, only 5 were children or adults baptized in articulo mortis.³⁴ Thus, it seems that some slaves who eschewed conformity in other aspects of their lives may have embraced Christian baptism before facing their mortality. Slaves may also have viewed baptism as a way to gain access to rights, including marriage.³⁵ Masters had their own reasons for ensuring that newborn slaves and the Africans they purchased from slave traders were baptized promptly: the record of baptism in the parish register, which noted the person's legal status, served as proof of ownership.³⁶ Both free and unfree inhabitants took advantage of opportunities to participate in the institutions and rituals of the church on their own terms.

Baptismal Sponsorship and Honor

Baptism fulfilled a wide variety of spiritual and social functions. For Catholics, baptism cleanses the individual of original sin. They believe that if a child who has been baptized dies before the age of moral responsibility, usually six or seven, his or her soul goes directly to heaven. Until recently many believed that should the child die unbaptized, he or she would go to limbo, if not to hell.³⁷ Baptism also symbolizes an individual's spiritual birth into the Christian community. For this reason, the Catholic Church places great emphasis on the selection of godparents to ensure that a child will receive religious education and guidance, especially if the child loses one or both parents to death.³⁸

The baptismal ceremony also served as a rite of initiation into the biological family (in the case of a newborn) and the local community (in the case of older children and adult initiates).³⁹ At the time of baptism, the child (or the adult) publicly assumed his or her own individual social identity through the acquisition of a Christian name, usually that of a saint who served as a patron for

34. The four adults baptized in articulo mortis had been born in Africa, which suggests that these adults may have refused baptism until death was imminent or perhaps were baptized against their will. "Libro primero de defunciones," Arecibo, 1714–67, APSFA; "Libro segundo de defunciones," Arecibo, 1769–91, APSFA.

35. Gerbner, *Christian Slavery*, 20. Baptism was a requirement for marriage in the church, the only recognized union during slavery.

36. Sued Badillo and López Cantos, *Puerto Rico negro*, 287.

37. Pitt-Rivers, *Fate of Shechem*, 54.

38. Mintz and Wolf, "Analysis of Ritual Co-parenthood," 341, 353.

39. See Vandekerckhove, "Role of Godparents," 148.

the new initiate.⁴⁰ It may seem to us that a slave's willing and outward embrace of Christianity signaled acquiescence to their enslavement to their owner and their submission to the parish priest. However, Kathleen Higgins argues that slaves and owners "interpreted the worldly outcomes of baptisms differently and attempted to manipulate their interests in these outcomes accordingly."⁴¹ Some slaves may have transformed baptism into a strategy of belonging by forging bonds of communal inclusiveness with other Afro-descended peoples. This may have been the case for Juana, an adult slave who belonged to Miguel Hernández and was baptized in Arecibo on August 1, 1772.⁴² Her godfather was Juan de Mata, a slave who belonged to Miguel's sister, Josefa Hernández. The fact that Juan de Mata was Juana's godfather integrated her into the group of slaves who belonged to the Hernández family. These ties were reinforced when Juan de Mata and his wife, Teresa de Rivera, a slave who belonged to Baltasar de Rivera, were selected as godparents for Juana's children.⁴³ In this case, baptismal sponsorship was likely used to establish social networks with a slave community and to formalize new or existing relationships.

Although the church allowed only one godfather and one godmother for each child, it did not have rules about the legal, racial, or social status of godparents. We do not know what proportion of the population served as a godparent, but the practice appears to have been widespread in Arecibo. During the period 1735–72, a total of 2,356 people served as godparents in Arecibo. We know that when the 1765 census was taken, the community's population was 3,171. I suspect that somewhere between two-thirds and three-fourths of Arecibo's population sponsored a child at baptism from 1735 to 1772. Although the minimum age for serving as a godparent in the diocese of Puerto Rico was 15, younger individuals sometimes served.⁴⁴ The godparents usually assumed the expenses associated with the celebration of this sacrament.⁴⁵ Godparents were also responsible for bringing the newborn infant to the parish church for baptism. Infants in eighteenth-century Puerto Rico were typically baptized when they were between 10 and 20 days old.⁴⁶ Some baptisms happened earlier

40. Pitt-Rivers, *Fate of Shechem*, 54, 60–61; Bloch and Guggenheim, "Compadrazgo," 378; Higgins, "Licentious Liberty," 130.

41. Higgins, "Licentious Liberty," 124.

42. "Libro cuarto de bautismos," Arecibo, 1764–72, APSFA, fol. 225r.

43. "Libro cuarto de bautismos," Arecibo, 1764–72, APSFA, fol. 215r; "Libro quinto de bautismos," Arecibo, 1772–86, APSFA, fol. 185r.

44. López de Haro, *Constituciones sinodales*, constitution xxxix, bylaw xlvi.

45. Schwartz, *Sugar Plantations*, 63.

46. I derived these numbers through the methodology of family reconstitution. Age at baptism was listed for 348 infants born to a slave parent in Arecibo in 1735–72; of these, 166

or later than that because of problems with the infant's health or difficulties related to traveling to the parish church.

According to Frank Proctor, when enslaved parents selected relatives of the owner as godparents, they probably did so because they had forged intimate ties with them in the domestic sphere, as when, for example, the slave mother and the owner's daughter had grown up together.⁴⁷ From a slave's standpoint, selecting members of the owner's family afforded greater opportunity to know them on a more personal level, something that might lead to greater possibilities for manumission. That such possibilities existed is suggested by the greater incidence of manumission in the waning years of the eighteenth century, when one out of every eight slaves was manumitted in San Juan.⁴⁸ While the extent of manumission in Arecibo is not known, it was not uncommon for slaves to select the sons and daughters of the wealthiest, most prominent, and most powerful members of the community to serve as godparents.

The role of godparents in the lives of infants after baptism is difficult to determine. Godparents occasionally gave their name to the infant and may have given them gifts at birth. They may even have remembered their godchildren in their wills, but a more active role beyond that cannot be established. The spiritual kinship that godparenthood created was probably the parents' way of assuring that their child would have help or assistance in times of need.⁴⁹ This was certainly true among the free population and may have also been the case among slaves. Godparents' responsibilities toward their godchildren and vice versa were defined by custom, not law.⁵⁰ Although the godparent ultimately determined the extent of his or her involvement in the godchild's life, community expectations for the role were probably enforced through gossip, pressure, and the threat of ostracism.

The fundamental problem in studying godparenthood among enslaved populations is that of choice. How much control did masters, slaves, or parish priests exercise over the selection of baptismal sponsors? When enslaved parents selected free godparents for their children, was this because masters used their authority to create or reinforce patron-client relationships? When an unfree godparent was selected for the child of a slave parent, is that evidence

infants (47.7 percent) were baptized at 15 days. In addition, 246 (70.7 percent) of the infants born to a slave parent were baptized within 14 to 16 days of birth. The number of infants baptized between 10 to 20 days of birth was 315 (90.5 percent).

47. Proctor, "Gender and the Manumission of Slaves," 326.

48. Szászdi, "Los registros del siglo XVIII," 62.

49. Schneider, *Public Life in Toulouse*, 247-48.

50. Pitt-Rivers, *Fate of Shechem*, 58.

that slave parents expressed agency by establishing or strengthening kinship ties within the ranks of the enslaved?⁵¹ Although the process by which godparents were chosen is not known, variations in the baptismal sponsors selected suggest that most often the initiative came from the parents but that on some occasions it came from the owners.

For male adolescents, serving as a godparent was likely connected to the cultivation of honor, a cultural asset that played a key role in ordering and structuring colonial Latin American society. Men and women used honor to manage relations with their neighbors and to establish and maintain their place in the community. Colonial understandings of honor were grounded in Iberian legal and customary practices. There were two types of honor. The first was based on status, which was reputational and largely inherited from one's ancestors. The second was based on the virtue of one's actions or those of family members.⁵² While status honor was largely fixed, virtue honor was not; it had to be asserted and confirmed by society, often in highly public and ritualized ways.⁵³ In Spain before the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries and in Latin America during the initial years of the conquest, affronts to male honor frequently led to violence. This proved to be socially disruptive, and efforts to modify such behavior led to a new model of virtue honor based on Christian morality.⁵⁴ Although the timing of this transition in Latin America has not been established, my findings suggest that the transition had occurred in Puerto Rico by the middle of the eighteenth century.⁵⁵

Virtue honor was an ephemeral quality that could not be measured but was manifested through one's actions.⁵⁶ Serving as a godparent for someone of a lower class was viewed as an act of charity, generosity, and piety; thus, it exemplified virtuous behavior.⁵⁷ Because Puerto Ricans in the eighteenth century were largely illiterate, highly visible public ceremonies like baptism conveyed symbolic meaning. Baptismal sponsorship provided males with an opportunity to acquire honor by demonstrating virtuous behavior within a religious and social context. It may have also been a way for adolescent males to assert their manhood. Alexandra Shepard has noted a similar phenomenon in

51. Higgins, "Licentious Liberty," 132.

52. Johnson and Lipsett-Rivera, "Introduction," 4–5.

53. Johnson and Lipsett-Rivera, 7.

54. Taylor, *Honor and Violence*, 104; Boyer, "Honor among Plebeians," 177.

55. On the timing of the transition for colonial Latin America as a whole, see Boyer, "Honor among Plebeians," 177n14.

56. Lipsett-Rivera, *Gender and the Negotiation of Daily Life*, 17.

57. Foyster, *Manhood in Early Modern England*, 37.

early modern England.⁵⁸ Much like honor, manhood was a status that had to be publicly acquired in a process that occurred over time. Godparenthood was an important and, in some cases, first step in elevating a young man's position and status within the community and in demonstrating his capacity to be recognized as an adult.

Looking to the Future: The Age of Godparents

At what age did men and women serve as baptismal sponsors? This aspect of godparent selection in the Americas has not been explored.⁵⁹ I determined the age of 337 men and 240 women who served as baptismal sponsors for infants born to at least one slave parent from 1735 to 1772 in Arecibo. There was considerable diversity in ages among free godparents. The youngest godfather was Diego Colón, who was 13 on May 25, 1739, when he sponsored Antonia, the daughter of Jacinto Báez, a slave who belonged to Juan Ximénez Báez, and María Molina, a *morena libre* (free black).⁶⁰ The oldest godfather was Rafael Pérez, a mixed-race man who was 62 on November 11, 1762, when he sponsored María, the daughter of Miguel and Manuela del Río, slaves who belonged to María de las Nieves Correa.⁶¹ Diego was likely selected at such a young age so that he would be able to help Antonia after her parents were gone. Because he was from one of Arecibo's oldest and most prominent families, he would have had the resources to help her. Choosing Diego may have been Jacinto and María's (or perhaps Juan's) way of establishing or strengthening ties with Diego's family.⁶² Analyzing why Rafael Pérez was selected as a godparent is more complicated. He was not a native of Arecibo, although he had lived there since the time of his marriage in 1737.⁶³ Rafael was regularly called on to stand as a

58. Shepard, *Meanings of Manhood*, 21. While Puerto Rican culture was different from English culture and Shepard focuses on a slightly different time period, her book provides food for thought about the relationship between virtuous behavior and assertions of manhood.

59. No one has studied the age of godparents in Latin America. Only two studies address the age of godparents in any part of the world. See Sabeen, *Kinship in Neckarhausen*, 143; Fertig, "Rural Society and Social Networks," 512.

60. "Libro segundo de bautismos," Arecibo, 1735–49, APSFA, fol. 48r.

61. "Libro tercero de bautismos," Arecibo, 1749–64, APSFA, fol. 343v.

62. The Ximénez Báez family was likely originally from Aguada or San Juan. Diego was the son of Pedro Pablo Ramos and Inés Meléndez. "Libro primero de bautismos," Arecibo, 1708–35, APSFA, fol. 117r.

63. Rafael and Francisca were married on May 10 in Arecibo. "Libro primero de matrimonios," Arecibo, 1708–60, APSFA, fol. 78v.

godfather; he did so a total of 17 times, including 6 times for enslaved infants.⁶⁴ Maybe Rafael's mixed-race ancestry appealed to some parents who believed that he had some leverage with other owners, or perhaps it was his wealth—he was a slave owner—that made him a popular choice. Another possibility is that as someone not from Arecibo, Rafael may have had to periodically reassert and defend his claim to honor and social status.

The age range for godmothers is also quite large. For example, Felipa de los Reyes was 13 on August 21, 1750, when she sponsored Estefania, the daughter of Cayetana, a slave who belonged to Juan Blas de Matos.⁶⁵ At the other end of the range, Isabel Castillo was 56 on August 12, 1771, when she sponsored Estefania María, the daughter of Andrés and Catarina, slaves who belonged to Josefa de los Olivos.⁶⁶ Like Diego Colón, young Felipa de los Reyes belonged to one of Arecibo's most prominent families. She was not related to Estefania's owner, as younger godparents often were. If Cayetana selected Felipa, it may have been because she was likely to outlive her and could thus care for Estefania after Cayetana was gone. If Cayetana's owner, the sergeant major in Arecibo and one of its most powerful citizens, was involved in selecting Felipa, he may have chosen her to establish or strengthen ties with her family.⁶⁷ The selection of Isabel Castillo as a godmother was atypical. This was the only time that she stood as a baptismal sponsor, and she was the oldest godmother in my sample by eight years.⁶⁸ Perhaps she and Estefania María's owner were lifelong friends or acquaintances, since they were both from San Juan and were similar in age.⁶⁹

64. Rafael served as a baptismal sponsor for infants born to slave parents in 1743, 1746, 1760, 1761, and 1762 (in which year he sponsored two infants). He sponsored infants born to free and freed parents in 1739, 1741, 1742, 1744, 1749, 1750, 1751, 1752, 1753, 1756, and 1761.

65. "Libro tercero de bautismos," Arecibo, 1749–64, APSFA, fol. 25r.

66. "Libro cuarto de bautismos," Arecibo, 1764–72, APSFA, fol. 199r.

67. Perhaps Blas de Matos looked favorably on Felipa as a possible bride for one of his unmarried sons. If so, his strategy of selecting her as a godparent failed, as 39 months later she married Tomás Colón. "Libro primero de matrimonios," Arecibo, 1708–60, APSFA, fol. 149v.

68. The next-oldest godmother in Arecibo was 48-year-old Francisca Serrano. She sponsored Martín, the son of Juana Muñiz, a slave who belonged to Bartolomé Brito. Martín was baptized on August 29, 1767. "Libro cuarto de bautismos," Arecibo, 1764–72, APSFA, fol. 83v.

69. Isabel was the daughter of Félix del Castillo and Isabel María de Almonte; she was baptized on October 11, 1714, in San Juan. Castro, "Rescate del Libro Primero." Josefa was the daughter of Alonso de los Olivos and Clemencia Franquis; she was baptized on January 20, 1710, in San Juan. "Libro segundo de bautismos en San Juan," 1706–23, Archivo Histórico Arquidiocesano de San Juan, fol. 29r.

There was also considerable diversity in age among unfree godparents. The youngest such godfather was Ambrosio, who was 14 when on June 12, 1743, he sponsored Fernando, another child of Cayetana.⁷⁰ The oldest unfree godfather was Francisco, who was 42 when on March 19, 1754, he sponsored Casimiro, the son of María de las Nieves, a slave who belonged to Teresa Manzano.⁷¹ Ambrosio's owner, Antonio de los Reyes Correa, was the father-in-law of Cayetana's owner, Juan Blas de Matos; thus Ambrosio (and his mother) and Cayetana may have at one point belonged to the same owner or lived on the same *hato*. Biological kinship likely factored in Ambrosio's selection; likewise, Francisco, the oldest godfather, was possibly related to his godchild's mother, María de las Nieves. If so, this illustrates the practice of horizontal linkage by which enslaved people expanded their social networks.

The unfree godmothers varied in age from 16 to 40. The youngest, María, sponsored Eusebia on September 15, 1766, the daughter of a slave also named Eusebia who belonged to Francisco Rodríguez de Matos. The oldest, Juana Jacinta, on March 29, 1754, sponsored Manuel, the son of Pedro and María del Rosario, slaves who belonged to Juan Colón and Mónica de Grados, respectively.⁷² Neither María nor Juana Jacinta was biologically related to her godchild's parents, and neither was the owner of these godparents and godchildren. The absence of familial ties suggests that the elder Eusebia and the del Rosarios used creative agency to forge social connections and spiritual bonds with fellow slaves living outside their immediate environment.

Most of the men and women selected as godparents for enslaved children were adults under the age of 30: 70.4 percent of unfree godparents for whom ages are known were under 30. Eighty-one percent of unfree female godparents for whom there were ages in the registers for 1735–72 were under age 30 at the time of baptism, compared to 68.5 percent of free female godparents. Most unfree godmothers were between 15 and 29 years old at the time of baptism. Few unfree godmothers were older than 30, and none was older than 44. Unfree godfathers were mainly between 20 and 34 at the time of baptism. By that age, some unfree males likely had acquired the means to take on the responsibilities associated with godparenthood. Access to provision grounds where they could grow food and raise small animals for their own use or for sale at local markets provided enslaved people with income-earning opportunities.⁷³ As was the case

70. "Libro segundo de bautismos," Arecibo, 1735–49, APSFA, fol. 114r.

71. "Libro tercero de bautismos," Arecibo, 1749–64, APSFA, fol. 154r.

72. "Libro cuarto de bautismos," Arecibo, 1764–72, APSFA, fol. 56r; "Libro tercero de bautismos," Arecibo, 1749–64, APSFA, fol. 117r.

73. Labor demands associated with the *hato* economy were minimal, and *hato* labor was typically less disciplined and less regimented than in the sugar-growing economy.

Table 1. Ages of godparents of infants born to at least one slave parent in
Arecibo, Puerto Rico, 1735–1772

Age	<i>Godfathers</i>				<i>Godmothers</i>			
	<i>Free</i>		<i>Unfree</i>		<i>Free</i>		<i>Unfree</i>	
		%		%		%		%
Younger than 15	8	2.6	1	2.9	12	5.9	0	0.0
15–19	34	11.2	2	5.9	42	20.7	7	18.9
20–24	75	24.8	8	23.5	48	23.6	14	37.8
25–29	66	21.8	9	26.5	37	18.2	9	24.3
30–34	54	17.8	8	23.5	27	13.3	2	5.4
35–39	30	9.9	4	11.8	16	7.9	2	5.4
40–44	16	5.3	2	5.9	12	5.9	3	8.1
45–49	8	2.6	0	0.0	8	3.9	0	0.0
50+	12	4.0	0	0.0	1	0.5	0	0.0
<i>Total</i>	303	100.0	34	100.0	203	~100.0	37	~100.0

Source: “Libro segundo de bautismos,” Arecibo, 1735–49, APSFA; “Libro tercero de bautismos,” Arecibo, 1740–64, APSFA; “Libro cuarto de bautismos,” Arecibo, 1764–72, APSFA.

Note: I was unable to determine the age of 244 free godfathers, 177 free godmothers, 52 unfree godfathers, and 32 free godmothers in the records.

for unfree women, for unfree males the probability that they would be selected as a godparent decreased with age. Enslaved males did not have opportunities to increase their status or to publicly assert their masculinity as they aged in the same way that free elite males did. Enslaved females and males were also probably reluctant to sponsor infants once they had families of their own.

As can be seen in table 1, the proportion of free males who served as godparents for enslaved infants before age 20 is 13.8 percent. For free females, the proportion is considerably higher: 26.6 percent. This may suggest that selection as a godmother served as preparation for motherhood or perhaps signaled a readiness to embrace a maternal role. Most free godparents agreed to serve before the age of 35: 78.2 percent for men and 81.7 percent for women. The average age for free godfathers was 28 years and 11 months and for free godmothers was 26 years and 6 months. Given that the average age at marriage in Arecibo from 1708 to 1791 was 24 years and 9 months for men and 21 years

While the latter used gang labor, non-sugar-producing activities were regulated by the task system, by which after completing their assigned tasks male slaves might use their free time to tend provision grounds or care for any small animals they might own. See Stark, *Slave Families*, 48–51.

and 3 months for women, many of the free godparents assumed this role when they were starting a family.⁷⁴ By the time they turned 35, men and women in Arecibo often had been married for ten or more years, which meant that their family resources would have been tied up in launching their own children into adulthood. Once they had families of their own, free men and women were thus probably reluctant to sponsor infants.

The average age of unfree godparents when sponsoring enslaved infants was 29 years and 4 months for men and 25 years and 2 months for women. Much like free godparents, most unfree godparents were under the age of 35: 82.3 percent of men and 86.4 percent of women. One explanation for this may be that the proportion of people 35 and older was much smaller for the unfree community than it was for the free community. That these average ages were similar to those for free godparents also suggests that while legal status may have been the most important consideration in selecting baptismal sponsors, age was also an important factor. Young people were probably chosen because they were expected to have longer left to live. But also, given that young people would have been raising young children, they would have had the stamina as well as the experience and energy to care for another child.

In addition to age, gender also seems to have factored in the selection of both free and unfree godparents for enslaved infants. For example, 8.8 percent of unfree male godparents were younger than 20, compared to 18.9 percent of unfree female godparents. Among both the free and unfree, adolescent females were much more likely than adolescent males to stand as a godmother to an infant. This may have been because serving as a godmother was preparation for motherhood. Furthermore, unfree women younger than 20 might have had more control over food than similarly aged unfree males given their work on provision grounds.

Limitations in the data may account for the young average age of godparents to enslaved infants in Arecibo. Baptismal information for individuals born before 1708 does not exist. Thus if a godparent were older than 27 in 1735, there would be no way to determine his or her age.⁷⁵ However, by determining the age of godparents for every infant baptized from 1764 to 1772 with at least one slave parent, it is possible to establish the proportion of godparents under and over the age of 30. This can then be compared to the overall findings. Both the average age of free and unfree baptismal sponsors and the proportion of

74. Stark, 118.

75. The only other communities on the island with baptismal registers from 1708 to 1730 are Coamo and San Juan. A handful of individuals baptized in these communities served as godparents in Arecibo.

godparents under the age of 30 concur with the trends for the entire period from 1735 to 1772.⁷⁶ Both men and women typically served as sponsors when between the ages of 15 and 29.

Several important trends emerge from the data regarding the age of free godparents to enslaved infants in Arecibo. Males under the age of 19 were less likely to serve than their female counterparts, 14 percent compared to 27 percent. This may have been because teenage males lacked the maturity or wherewithal to take on the adult responsibilities associated with baptismal sponsorship. Nevertheless, some males of this age range (or their families) did welcome the opportunity to publicly affirm their status by standing as a baptismal sponsor. For example, Juan Antonio de Rivas was 13 when he sponsored Inés, the daughter of Josefa, a slave who belonged to Francisco Correa, on November 21, 1739.⁷⁷ The Rivases were originally from San Juan and perhaps wanted to enhance their status in Arecibo; having a son serve as a godparent would have visibly indicated esteem and public honor.

Greater parity existed among free male and female godparents aged 20 to 49: 82.2 percent of all godfathers, versus 72.8 percent of all godmothers. Men and women within this age range were typically married and had biological families of their own, yet many apparently embraced the additional responsibilities of godparenthood. After age 25, individuals were less likely to serve as baptismal sponsors the older they got. Individuals over 50 were unlikely to serve as godparents, although some did, after raising their own children. This may have been part of a deliberate strategy to reaffirm their prominence and status within the community.

Baptismal Sponsorship as a Rite of Passage

In colonial Latin America, rites of passage were social events that often involved religious ceremonies. For example, the sacraments of baptism, confirmation,

76. The average age of free male godparents was 28 years (compared to 28 years and 11 months for the overall period 1735–72); for free female godparents it was 27 years and 10 months (compared to 26 years and 6 months for 1735–72). Unfree godfathers were 27 years and 7 months on average (compared to 29 years and 4 months for all such men from 1735 to 1772); unfree godmothers were 25 years old on average (compared to 25 years and 2 months for all such women from 1735 to 1772). Sixty-eight percent of free godfathers were under age 30, as were 66 percent of free godmothers (compared to 61 percent and 68 percent, respectively, overall from 1735 to 1772). Sixty percent of unfree godfathers and 90 percent of unfree godmothers were younger than 30 (compared to 58 percent and 81 percent, respectively, overall from 1735 to 1772).

77. "Libro segundo de bautismos," Arecibo, 1735–49, APSFA, fol. 51v.

and matrimony (all of which involve the selection of sponsors) were important rites of passage that publicly acknowledged that an individual belonged to a new group or status. Rites of passage mark life transitions and convey and reinforce a society's dominant political, religious, and social views.⁷⁸ Arnold van Gennep, who pioneered the study of rites of passage, argued that they are performed in a public and religious context to consolidate social ties, establish rules, and give members of a group a sense of purpose and placement within the community. Such rites also provide a sense of who belongs, transmit a community's core values, and confer the roles and responsibilities appropriate to a person's stage of life.⁷⁹ One of the most important transitions is that from childhood to adulthood. However, we know very little about the process of this transition in eighteenth-century Spanish colonies, especially how adolescents learned to behave like men.

Children did not become adults in a day; the transition to adulthood was a stepwise process. Once children and adolescents attained specific ages, they were legally able to participate in certain activities. The first stage of life was infancy, which ended at the age of six or seven, when the church considered the child to be a person who was responsible for his or her actions. At that point, children were expected to participate in Catholicism's rituals (fasting on Fridays and during Lent) and sacraments (penance and the Eucharist).⁸⁰ Age was also combined with legal, sociocultural, and religious markers to denote one's life stage. For example, according to Spanish and canon law a child could be engaged to marry at the age of seven, could leave a will at the age of ten, could be tried for crimes at ten and a half years old, and could be sentenced as an adult at the age of eighteen.⁸¹

No formal rite of passage marked the transition from childhood to adolescence. As Sonya Lipsett-Rivera has noted, "Adolescence was not recognized as a life stage in Spanish law."⁸² There was no notion of teenage years. The transition to adolescence in the past was biologically based—when a person, either male or female, was able to conceive a child—and not culturally or socially defined. Children made the transition to adolescence when they reached puberty, which in colonial Latin America typically occurred at age 12

78. Premo, *Children of the Father King*, 4. Another important rite of passage involving religious ceremonies, extreme unction, was not public.

79. Van Gennep, *Rites of Passage*, 65–115.

80. Lipsett-Rivera, "Model Children," 61.

81. Premo, *Children of the Father King*, 22.

82. Lipsett-Rivera, *Origins of Macho*, 21.

for females and age 14 for males.⁸³ This coincided with the age at which individuals were legally able to marry, according to the Council of Trent (1545–63).⁸⁴ However, few people married at such young ages. Females of Spanish descent normally married between 14 and 21 years old, males after age 25.⁸⁵ Until a person—male or female, regardless of racial and social status—married or reached the age of 25, he or she was considered a “minor of age,” whose property and person were controlled by the male head of the household.⁸⁶

From the time a person reached puberty until they attained the age of legal majority, they were in a holding pattern—on their way to becoming an adult, but not quite there yet. During this period, young people learned the appropriate models of adult behavior by acting more like adults. One way to do so was by demonstrating virtuous behavior and maturity as a godparent.⁸⁷ In taking on adult responsibilities and effectively performing them, adolescents enhanced their reputation and standing in the community. They also displayed a grasp of appropriate models of adult behavior, such as knowing their place in the social structure.⁸⁸ In signaling their readiness to care for a child, males showed that they were prepared to provide for a family, and females asserted their ability to mother. Selection as a godparent was public affirmation that an adolescent had crossed the threshold into adulthood.

That godparentage played this transitional role from adolescence is suggested by the fact that unmarried baptismal sponsors in the records for Arecibo were relatively young: Nearly half of all single free and unfree godfathers were aged 20 to 29. Unmarried godmothers were often younger than 25: 50.2 percent of all single free godmothers and 56.7 percent of all single unfree godmothers. Their participation in the practice of baptismal sponsorship had a social character. Baptismal sponsors entered fictive relationships with their godchild (or the adult being baptized)—known as *padrinazgo* (sponsorship)—and with the parent or parents of the child being baptized—known as *compadrazgo* (companionship).⁸⁹ These fictive relationships could help establish vertical ties with prominent or powerful members of the community or reinforce horizontal ties with persons of a similar legal or social status. And while these younger adults would have had less experience and fewer economic

83. Premo, *Children of the Father King*, 28.

84. Premo, 22.

85. Jefferson and Lokken, *Daily Life*, 12.

86. This control was known as *potestad*. See Premo, *Children of the Father King*, 22–23.

87. Foyster, *Manhood in Early Modern England*, 36–37.

88. Lipsett-Rivera, *Origins of Macho*, 5.

89. Pitt-Rivers, *Fate of Shechem*, 59.

resources, their youth would have been their asset to those with whom they were establishing the fictive relationship, as it meant that they could be useful often and for a long time to the baptized child's parents.

Not everyone in Arecibo served as a godparent. From 1735 to 1772, at least 1,208 males and 1,148 females served as baptismal sponsors. Just over half the males who served as godparents—633—sponsored a child born to a slave parent. A smaller proportion of Arecibo's godmothers during this period—449 (39.1 percent)—sponsored such children. This is probably the case because it was more important for males to publicly assert their honor by performing their readiness for adulthood, while females simply needed to signal their coming of age for potential motherhood. A male's reputation was important for his economic well-being in Arecibo. Specie was scarce in island communities, and most transactions were based on credit. It was thus imperative for adolescent males to begin to build an honorable reputation and expand their social network so that they could gain access to financial assistance; failing to establish an honorable reputation probably meant economic hardship. Another possible explanation for the gender imbalance is that given the greater likelihood that a slave parent would die young, males were more likely than females to have the economic resources to support an orphaned child. I have been able to analyze the relationship between baptismal sponsorship and marriage for 495 of the 1,082 godparents to enslaved infants in this study.⁹⁰ Within this group, 201 (41 percent) were selected as godparents before marriage (table 2), and 294 (59 percent) were selected after marriage (table 3).

Thirty-nine percent of free godfathers and 49 percent of free godmothers married within three years of their first baptismal sponsorship. When Feliciano, the daughter of Juana, a slave who belonged to Juana Colón, was baptized on June 30, 1754, two siblings—22-year-old Juan and 19-year-old Jacinta de Roxas—served as godparents. Within 15 months Jacinta was married; Juan married 1 month after serving as a baptismal sponsor.⁹¹ This had been the first time that Juan and Jacinta had served as godparents. In accepting the spiritual and moral obligations of baptismal sponsorship, Juan confirmed that he was ready for marriage, and Jacinta signaled that she was ready to nurture a child and

90. Not everyone in my sample had gotten married in Arecibo; many were likely married in the nearby communities of Aguada and Manatí, where parish registers from the eighteenth century no longer exist, or in Utuado, which lacks marriage registers from this period. Also, some godparents had migrated to the island from other Spanish colonies or from Europe.

91. "Libro tercero de bautismos," Arecibo, 1749–64, APSFA, fol. 126v.

Table 2. Length of time between selection for godparenthood to an enslaved infant and marriage in Arecibo, Puerto Rico, 1735–1772

Years between godparentage and marriage	<i>Godfathers</i>				<i>Godmothers</i>			
	<i>Free</i>		<i>Unfree</i>		<i>Free</i>		<i>Unfree</i>	
		%		%		%		%
< 1	9	8.0	4	26.7	10	14.9	0	0.0
≤ 2	17	15.2	3	20.0	15	22.4	1	14.3
≤ 3	18	16.1	1	6.7	8	11.9	1	14.3
≤ 4	13	11.6	1	6.7	8	11.9	0	0.0
≤ 5	7	6.3	1	6.7	4	6.0	0	0.0
≤ 6	10	8.9	2	13.3	5	7.4	0	0.0
≤ 7	9	8.0	0	0.0	4	6.0	1	14.3
≤ 8	9	8.0	1	6.7	6	9.0	1	14.3
≤ 9	2	1.8	1	6.7	2	3.0	0	0.0
≤ 10	3	2.7	0	0.0	1	1.5	0	0.0
> 10	15	13.4	1	6.7	4	6.0	3	42.9
<i>Total</i>	112	100.0	15	~ 100.0	67	100.0	7	~ 100.0

Source: “Libro segundo de bautismos,” Arecibo, 1735–49, APSFA; “Libro tercero de bautismos,” Arecibo, 1749–64, APSFA; “Libro cuarto de bautismos,” Arecibo, 1764–72, APSFA; “Libro primero de matrimonios,” Arecibo, 1708–60, APSFA; “Libro segundo de matrimonios,” Arecibo, 1762–91, APSFA.

thus would be a good mother. Both siblings completed the transition to full adulthood through marriage soon after.

Some single godparents in Arecibo delayed marriage for longer periods of time. For example, Diego Colón served as godfather at the age of 13 for Antonia, the daughter of Jacinto Báez, a former slave who belonged to Juan Ximénez Báez, and María Molina, a morena libre, on May 25, 1739; he did not marry until 15 years later.⁹² Similarly, Rosalía Colón—14 years old when she served as godmother on April 4, 1755, for Tomás, the son of Antonio and Antonia, slaves who belonged to her aunt, Cayetana Colón—did not marry until 13 years after the baptism.⁹³ We cannot know why some people delayed marriage. Perhaps both Diego and Rosalía were betrothed to someone who died

92. For Antonia’s baptism, see “Libro segundo de bautismos,” Arecibo, 1735–49, APSFA, fol. 48r. Diego married María Meléndez on January 22, 1755, in Arecibo: “Libro primero de matrimonios,” Arecibo, 1708–60, APSFA, fol. 154v.

93. For Tomás’s baptism, see “Libro tercero de bautismos,” Arecibo, 1749–64, APSFA, fol. 147r. Rosalía married Juan de Otero on July 15, 1768, in Arecibo: “Libro segundo de matrimonios,” Arecibo, 1762–91, APSFA, fol. 52v.

before they could marry; they may have had family obligations or disfiguring illnesses that made it difficult for their families to find spouses for them. Because Diego and Rosalía belonged to two of Arecibo's most prominent families, they were likely selected as godparents because their godchildren's parents were looking toward the future.

Although there are too few unfree godparents in the registers to discern patterns regarding length of time between baptismal sponsorship and marriage, some enslaved males married shortly after standing as a godparent to an enslaved infant. One example is 23-year-old Tomás, a slave who belonged to José Colón. Tomás served on January 30, 1747, as a godfather to María, the daughter of Pedro and Clara, slaves who belonged to Baltasar Colón. Tomás married nine months later, on November 7, 1747.⁹⁴ Another example is Francisca, a slave who belonged to Bernardino Cardona and on November 3, 1751, served as a godmother to Fernando, the son of Juan and Felipa María, slaves who belonged to Miguel de Quiñones. Francisca married 14 months later, on January 7, 1753.⁹⁵ Further research is needed to determine if these examples are representative of trends in the broader slave population.

Baptismal sponsorship of enslaved infants and the timing of marriage were linked, particularly for free women. Nearly 45 percent of the free godmothers in this study first served as baptismal sponsors between ages 15 and 24. Just over 50 percent of these women were married within two years of serving in this capacity. Within the free population, more men than women were aged 20–29 when selected to serve as godparents. However, free females who served as godparents were twice as likely to do so before the age of 20. Almost 40 percent of all free and unfree men selected to be godfathers between ages 20 and 29 (158 men) married within two years. The siblings Antonio and María Colón provide two examples of this pattern. He was 26 and she was 17 on September 20, 1768, when they sponsored Dominga, the daughter of Juana, a slave who belonged to Antonio Correa.⁹⁶ One year later, both siblings had married. From 1751 to 1790 in Yauco, located along the island's southern coast, the proportion of free and unfree godparents aged 20–29 who married within two years of baptismal sponsorship was even higher (52 percent of godparents and 55 percent of godmothers).⁹⁷ Although those who married within two years of serving as a

94. "Libro segundo de bautismos," Arecibo, 1735–49, APSFA, fol. 165r; "Libro primero de matrimonios," Arecibo, 1708–60, APSFA, fol. 116v.

95. "Libro tercero de bautismos," Arecibo, 1749–64, APSFA, fol. 54r; "Libro primero de matrimonios," Arecibo, 1708–60, fol. 142v.

96. "Libro cuarto de bautismos," Arecibo, 1764–72, APSFA, fol. 112v.

97. See Stark, "Family Life of Slaves," 282.

baptismal sponsor for an infant born to at least one slave parent were a small proportion of the total number of godparents in my sample, the evidence suggests that most single godparents took longer to make the transition to full adulthood. This does not appear to have been a localized trend; the two-year interval between sponsorship and marriage was common in other communities on the island.

Occasionally a free couple served as baptismal sponsors for an enslaved infant before they married, as was the case for Polonia and Manuel, whom I mentioned in the introduction. Another example is Juan de Heredia and Manuela de Jesús, who served as godparents on February 22, 1756, for María, the daughter of María, a slave who belonged to Juan de Rivera. They married nearly three years later, on December 10, 1758.⁹⁸ We know that Juan was 24 years old when he was selected as a godfather, but we do not know Manuela's age. We know that the average age at first marriage for free women in Arecibo was 21 years and 3 months, so Manuela was likely in her teens when she served as a godmother.⁹⁹ She may have decided to wait until she was older to marry. Although it may have been a coincidence that Juan and Manuela served together as godparents and then later married, the evidence suggests that it was not. They also served as godparents for Rafael, the son of a free woman named Josefa de la Concepción, on November 12, 1757, just over a year before they married. It thus seems likely that they were a couple and that they were chosen to serve as godparents together because of that fact.¹⁰⁰ Similarly, on October 27, 1746, Adrián de Monserrate and Juana de la Rosa served as godparents for Francisco, the son of *parda libre* (free person of mixed race) María Román and Mateo, a slave who belonged to Mateo Vásquez. The godparents were married two months later, on December 28, 1746, in Arecibo.¹⁰¹ Because Adrián and Juana were not from Arecibo and were freed individuals, their roles as baptismal sponsors likely facilitated their integration into social networks among the local freed and enslaved community.

Not all godparents to enslaved infants aged 15 to 29 were single, although many of them were. Altogether, 95 of 302 free godparents in this age range (31.4 percent) were married. Thirty-eight percent of the free godmothers aged 15 to 29 were married, compared to 27 percent of similarly aged godfathers.

98. "Libro tercero de bautismos," Arecibo, 1749–64, APSFA, fol. 170v; "Libro primero de matrimonios," Arecibo, 1708–60, APSFA, fol. 174r.

99. Stark, *Slave Families*, 118.

100. "Libro tercero de bautismos," Arecibo, 1749–64, APSFA, fol. 215v.

101. "Libro segundo de bautismos," Arecibo, 1735–49, APSFA, fol. 161r; "Libro primero de matrimonios," Arecibo, 1708–60, APSFA, fol. 113v.

Table 3. Length of marriage at time of baptismal sponsorship of enslaved infant for married godparents in Arecibo, Puerto Rico, 1735–1772

Years of marriage	Males				Females				Couples	
	Free		Unfree		Free		Unfree		Free and unfree	
		%		%		%		%		%
1–10	63	58.9	4	40.0	15	51.7	2	40.0	59	57.3
11–20	20	18.7	2	20.0	7	24.1	2	40.0	37	35.9
21+	24	22.4	4	40.0	7	24.1	1	20.0	7	6.8
<i>Total</i>	107	100.0	10	100.0	29	~100.0	5	100.0	103	100.0

Source: “Libro segundo de bautismos,” Arecibo, 1735–49, APSFA; “Libro tercero de bautismos,” Arecibo, 1749–64, APSFA; “Libro cuarto de bautismos,” Arecibo, 1764–72, APSFA; “Libro primero de matrimonios,” Arecibo, 1708–60, APSFA; “Libro segundo de matrimonios,” Arecibo, 1762–91, APSFA.

Note: I was unable to determine how long 40 individuals in my sample were married.

During their first ten years of marriage, men, women, and married couples sponsoring a child together served as godparents with similar frequency. The evidence suggests that as godparents began having families of their own, they became reluctant to take on responsibility for other children, particularly infants born to slave parents. By the time a woman had been married for 10 to 20 years, she often had many children. Free godparents to enslaved infants probably also had several godchildren born to free or freed parents. In some cases, the godparents who sponsored an enslaved child ten or more years after their marriage were related to the owner of the baptized child’s parent—which gives further credence to Proctor’s hypothesis that enslaved mothers selected such godparents due to intimate ties forged during childhood. For instance, on March 11, 1771, José de Matos and his wife of 16 years, María de la Cruz Ortiz, sponsored José, the son of Teodora, a slave who belonged to María’s father, Raymundo Ortiz. Likewise, Cecilia del Olmo had been married for 11 years when on March 16, 1750, she sponsored Rita, the daughter of Clara, a slave who belonged to her brother Nicolas del Olmo. Five years later, on April 15, 1755, Cecilia sponsored José, the son of María, a slave who belonged to another brother, Francisco del Olmo.¹⁰²

After 20 years of marriage, married men were more likely to serve as baptismal sponsors to enslaved children than during 11–20 years of marriage,

102. “Libro cuarto de bautismos,” Arecibo, 1764–72, APSFA, fol. 188r; “Libro tercero de bautismos,” Arecibo, 1749–64, APSFA, fols. 117v, 148r.

while married couples were less likely to jointly sponsor a child. Those married for more than 20 years occasionally served as godparents alongside their children. For example, on January 25, 1761, Pedro Ortiz had been married for 21 years when he and his 16-year-old daughter, Margarita, served as godparents for Luciana, the daughter of Catalina, a slave who belonged to Juan Carrión.¹⁰³ Lorenza Manzano had been married for 30 years when on May 21, 1748, she and her 20-year-old son, Vicente de Santiago, served as godparents for Manuel, the son of free person of color Maria Ruiz and Mateo, a slave who belonged to Mateo Vásquez.¹⁰⁴ The godparents do not appear to have been related to the slave owner in either of these two cases. Although a person was less likely to be selected as a godparent as he or she aged, some people evidently returned to godparenting after raising their own children. However, parents clearly preferred godparents below the age of 35.

Some of the couples who jointly served as godparents long after they had married were among Arecibo's economic, political, and social elite. For instance, when they served as godparents on April 5, 1772, for Benito, the son of Josefa, a slave who belonged to Juan Antonio de Rivera, Bartolomé González and María de los Angeles Serrano had been married for over 28 years and had seven surviving children, aged 13 to 26.¹⁰⁵ Because their children were older, Bartolomé and María de los Angeles could cope with the responsibilities associated with becoming godparents to another child. Although he was selected 14 times as a godfather, this was the only time that Bartolomé stood as a sponsor for a slave child.¹⁰⁶ As a captain in the local militia, Bartolomé was one of the most powerful individuals in Arecibo. Men like him may have sponsored slave infants to solidify a social relationship with the infants' owners or to visibly reaffirm their prominence in the community. In this specific case, it is also possible that Bartolomé was the infant's father. Serving as a godparent reinforced hierarchical structures, since the godchildren would owe deference to their godparents. If the child's mother was responsible for choosing the godfather, she may have chosen Bartolomé as a way of improving her son's life and perhaps even her own.

103. "Libro tercero de bautismos," Arecibo, 1749–64, APSFA, fol. 299r.

104. "Libro segundo de bautismos," Arecibo, 1735–49, APSFA, fol. 180r.

105. "Libro cuarto de bautismos," Arecibo, 1764–72, APSFA, fol. 216r. Bartolomé was 49 years old at the time. He had married María de los Angeles on October 2, 1743, in Arecibo: "Libro primero de matrimonios," Arecibo, 1708–60, APSFA, fol. 101v.

106. Bartolomé served as godfather once in 1743, three times in 1758, three times in 1762, once in 1763, once in 1764, once in 1766, once in 1768, once in 1770, and twice in 1772.

Conclusion

We need to pay more attention to interactions between free and unfree people in eighteenth-century Puerto Rico, and we must try to understand what those interactions meant to those who experienced them. In the absence of primary source material pertaining to the demographic patterns of behavior for enslaved and free populations in much of the Caribbean and Latin America, baptismal records provide a valuable window on the past. Although baptismal records tell us only a few details about the baptized infants, their parents, and their godparents, family reconstitution enables us to reconstruct some demographic aspects of baptismal sponsorship. As Sherwin Bryant has noted, sacramental records offer us “momentary snapshots” of the intimate lives of individuals contained therein and the communities they lived in.¹⁰⁷ These baptismal records from eighteenth-century Arecibo reveal much about how parents used the selection of godparents both to expand social networks across racial and class lines and to strengthen solidarity within their own communities.

Communities need formalized roles, boundaries, and relationships to facilitate cooperation and cohesion. Formal rites of passage help establish these. The transition from childhood to adulthood was important because it signaled a person’s readiness to assume adult roles and responsibilities. Our knowledge of how and when this process occurred in colonial Latin America has been scant until now. By serving as a godparent, one publicly acknowledged the transition from adolescence to adulthood in a religious and social context. Free adolescents may have been selected to serve as godparents by enslaved or freed parents before moving on to sponsor children born to free white parents. Godparenthood was a proving ground; if a young person could succeed in this trial run for adulthood, with backup from the child’s biological parents, then he or she was ready to marry and to raise children. For some adolescents, godparenthood provided a way to cross the threshold to adulthood. By taking on the spiritual and moral obligations associated with baptismal sponsorship, adolescents proved their maturity.

During the mid-eighteenth century, Puerto Rican society was experiencing social and economic changes. Rapid population growth in communities like Arecibo was blurring class distinctions. The island also experienced economic growth as the Spanish crown sought to make Puerto Rico more profitable and implemented administrative and economic reforms as part of broader institutional changes within the empire. After 1765, the island experienced modest economic growth, mainly through the expansion of cash crops such as sugar,

107. Bryant, *Rivers of Gold*, 91.

coffee, tobacco, and cotton. As the ranks of the new rich grew, elites sought new ways to assert their position in society. Whereas in the past honor had routinely been granted to the landed elite, this was no longer the case. Elites sought to distinguish themselves from both the newly rich and the less well off. Thus, elites probably saw baptismal sponsorship of children born to slave parents as a way of accomplishing that. In a class society, social recognition was of great value. Godparenthood made social status public.

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