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‘I cannot live without money’: Barbara Newton’s management of her wealth and property in Barbados

In an article published in 1993, Hilary Beckles argued that there had been no ‘systematic assessment of white women’s autonomous roles as economic agents and positive participators in the formulation of pro-slavery values and institutions’. More than a decade later, in 2007, Cecily Jones published *Engendering Whiteness: White Women and Colonialism in Barbados and North Carolina, 1627-1865*. In her reassessment of the role of white women on the island, Jones argued that an examination of women property owners’ connections to England needed to be explored—and yet, this lacuna in the scholarship persists. There is also very little study of early modern English women's active participation in the economic practices of colonialism and slavery. Using the previously unpublished and little known correspondence of Barbary (als Barbara) Newton, during the period 1683-1689, this paper will address the gaps identified by both Beckles and Jones, to examine the role of Newton as an absentee property and slave-owner in late-seventeenth century Barbados. Newton's intimate networks in England and the wider Atlantic world shed light on the ways that she managed wealth and property in Barbados, including that of enslaved people. Newton employed various social, economic and legal tools, including her will, letter writing, and attorneys, in order to generate and safeguard her wealth, and also ensure the transmission of capital from one generation to the next. Newton's letter detail how she sought to collect debts, manage her slaves, and engage in agricultural innovation. An inventory of her plantation taken after her death shows she was a considerable slave-owner. By considering the role of Newton as an absentee slave-owner, this papers illuminates how gender shaped early modern slavery and suggest how wealth generated through slave-ownership subsequently circulated in early modern England. For the first time, households were accruing wealth that was generated through the exploitation of people and land in English overseas colonies—and the management of household wealth was a responsibility that usually fell to women.