

CURRENT CARIBBEAN RESEARCH
FIVE CENTURIES
AFTER COLUMBUS

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THE TAINOS: RISE AND DECLINE OF THE PEOPLE WHO GREETED COLUMBUS.
By Irving Rouse. (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1992.
Pp. 211. \$25.00.)

*A HISTORY OF BARBADOS: FROM AMERINDIAN SETTLEMENT TO NATION-
STATE.* By Hilary M. Beckles. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press,
1990. Pp. 224. \$37.50 cloth, \$15.95 paper.)

*THE MAROONS OF JAMAICA, 1655–1796: A HISTORY OF RESISTANCE, COL-
LABORATION, AND BETRAYAL.* By Mavis C. Campbell. (Granby, Mass.:
Bergin and Garvey, 1988. Pp. 296. \$39.95.)

THE BONI MAROON WARS IN SURINAME. By Wim Hoogbergen. Trans-
lated by Marilyn Suy. (Leiden, The Netherlands: E. J. Brill, 1990. Pp. 254.
\$60.00.)

ALABI'S WORLD. By Richard Price. (Baltimore, Md.: Johns Hopkins Uni-
versity Press, 1990. Pp. 444. \$59.90 cloth, \$18.95 paper.)

*CUBAN RURAL SOCIETY IN THE NINETEENTH CENTURY: THE SOCIAL AND
ECONOMIC HISTORY OF MONOCULTURE IN MATANZAS.* By Laird W.
Bergad. (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1990. Pp. 425.
\$65.00.)

*CAPITALISM IN COLONIAL PUERTO RICO: CENTRAL SAN VICENTE IN THE
LATE NINETEENTH CENTURY.* By Teresita Martínez-Vergne. (Gaines-
ville: University Press of Florida, 1992. Pp. 189. \$27.95 cloth.)

*THE PROBLEM OF FREEDOM: RACE, LABOR, AND POLITICS IN JAMAICA
AND BRITAIN, 1832–1938.* By Thomas C. Holt. (Baltimore, Md.: Johns
Hopkins University Press, 1992. Pp. 517. \$65.00 cloth, \$19.95 paper.)

Encounters in the Caribbean between indigenous peoples and Europeans after 1492 gave rise to an early version of comparative ethnography that had no sense of history. Meanwhile, traditional histories of the region had learned little from anthropology. Tragically, this region was one where Europeans rapidly destroyed the “others,” replacing them for purposes of labor with enslaved Africans and indentured Asians on a

massive scale. Thus for five centuries, the political, economic, social, and cultural history of the Caribbean has been inseparable from the pervasive impact of the colonial process led first by Spain, then by several northern European powers, and more lately by the United States. The fact that the Caribbean has been an integral, although dominated, part of the "Western World" for so long has confounded the academic disciplines, which became compartmentalized in the nineteenth century. For traditional historians, the Caribbean has been no more than an aspect of imperial history, in effect a mere footnote. For most anthropologists, the peoples of the Caribbean were not "simple" or isolated enough to constitute the kind of pristine natives the discipline traditionally preferred. Yet ironically, the Caribbean peoples were not considered "complex" or "Western" enough by most sociologists to be suitable subjects for their discipline. Meanwhile, most economists and political scientists considered the Caribbean such a self-evident "basket case" of economic and political instability that it could offer no lessons whatever. This stance remained the predominant one among many metropolitan scholars, and it still prevails in some instances.

While few metropolitan academics were taking the Caribbean seriously, a handful of outstanding scholars from the region pioneered its study, often in an interdisciplinary fashion. I am thinking of such examples as Haitian Jean Price-Mars's *Ainsi parla l'oncle* (1928), Trinidadian C. L. R. James's *The Black Jacobins* (1938), and Cuban Fernando Ortiz's *Contrapunteo cubano del tabaco y el azúcar* (1940). These works explored the connections between culture, economics, history, and social structure with reference to the relentless dialectic between the colonizers and the colonized. In so doing, these scholars defined the Caribbean peoples themselves not as mere victims but as subjects of their own history, and increasingly of world history as well.

Scholarly traditions have changed in subsequent decades, and study of the Caribbean has certainly burgeoned in the last half-century, yet a persistent feeling remains in some circles of Latin American as well as North American academia that this is a peripheral region, too heterogeneous to be coherent and too small to be significant. Although the rise of Fidel Castro during the cold war convinced some U.S. academics and foundations that the region warranted serious research, it was treated largely as a locus of "geopolitical concern." It is clear to serious students of the largely Caribbean, however, that the study of this so-called peripheral region is far from peripheral and that understanding the historical process in the Caribbean actually contributes centrally to our comprehension of the development of the Atlantic and wider world. Reading this sample of recent books reinforces this conviction because they are so varied and, in general, so excellent.

The Indigenous Peoples and Colonization

Medieval European legends about monstrous anthropophagi were first associated with the "Caribs" of the Lesser Antilles who were described in Christopher Columbus's journal and in his letter to Ferdinand and Isabella in February 1493. Columbus's distinction between his informants in the western Caribbean, whom he described as timid and guileless, and the people of the east, whom he reported as ferocious, has been canonized in the now-classic distinction between peaceful Arawaks and fierce Caribs. New scholarship, however, is breaking down this colonial myth. Although a new paradigm has yet to emerge, Irving Rouse's comprehensive summary, *The Tainos: Rise and Decline of the People Who Greeted Columbus*, will contribute to understanding of the great variety, complexity, and nuance of pre-Columbian Caribbean history. Now Professor Emeritus of Anthropology at Yale University, Rouse has been publishing studies of Caribbean archaeology for over fifty years, and *The Tainos* is his summary opus.

Rouse analyzes the history and culture of the Tainos, who inhabited the Bahamas and Greater Antilles when Columbus arrived. He explores their predecessors and ancestors and reconstructs their development and relations with other groups (including the disastrous impact of the European invasion) and their contributions to the formation of Caribbean culture. Using a variety of cultural, archaeological, linguistic, and biological evidence, Rouse suggests that although Taino ancestry may be traced to Middle American and Amazonian origins, Taino culture itself developed within the Caribbean archipelago. The ancestors of the Taino, known as Casimiroid peoples after the site of Casimira in the southwest of the Dominican Republic, moved via Belize and Yucatán into Cuba and Hispaniola around 4000 B.C. The Ortoiroid peoples, named after a local culture in Trinidad, migrated from the area around the Orinoco into the Lesser Antilles around 2000 B.C., reaching Puerto Rico by 1000 B.C. and establishing a "frontier" with the Casimiroid peoples across the Mona Passage. The first Caribbean cultural interaction, it seems, occurred between these two peoples, with diffusion occurring "entirely from northwest to southeast" (p. 67).

Subsequently, Saladoid peoples migrated from South America and spread throughout the Lesser Antilles as far as Puerto Rico by about 200 B.C. These people introduced ceramics to the Caribbean and made linguistic and biological contributions to the eventual development of the Tainos. Rouse argues that these migrations reseeded the Caribbean in the sense that the previous societies were absorbed and replaced by the new inhabitants, with an almost bewildering array of cultures resulting from interaction and local adaptations. Rouse guides readers expertly through these many variations, distinguishing between ceramic styles

and artifact typology as well as differing uses of local resources. By the twelfth century A.D., the Bahamian archipelago was settled by the people known as Lucayan Tainos, whose descendants first discovered Columbus.

Rouse dismisses the idea that each of the many peoples and cultures of the Caribbean migrated from the mainland. He argues instead that apart from the first Casimiroid and Ortoiroid peoples and the Cedrosan Saladoids, "all the others developed in the islands" (p. 103). Although long-distance trade kept some peoples in contact, others developed culturally in relative isolation, interacting mainly with their close neighbors. According to Rouse, the peoples of the Windward Islands "began to go their own way about 300 A.D." (p. 133), and a succession of local ethnic groups were replaced by the "Island-Caribs" around 1450. By 1492, five major groups of peoples and cultures were distributed throughout the islands: the Guanahatabey in western Cuba; the Western Taino in the Bahamas, Cuba, and Jamaica; the Classic Taino in eastern Cuba, Hispaniola, and Puerto Rico; the Eastern Taino in the Lesser Antilles north of Guadeloupe; and the Island-Caribs to the south.

Rouse does not hesitate to use the word "genocide" to characterize "the second re-peopling" of the Caribbean, a process so rapid that few Amerindian habitation sites of the sixteenth century have been identified and excavated. Rouse summarizes the contacts made during Columbus's voyages, culminating in the fact that the great explorer was kept alive by Amerindians in Jamaica when he was marooned there for a year on his final voyage. During the European invasion and conquest, Amerindians were enslaved and transported, forced to work in goldfields and estates, and massacred when they rebelled. The increasing "shortage of labor," as the Spaniards considered it, resulted in slaving raids to the Bay Islands of Honduras, which like the Bahamas were soon depopulated. Within a quarter century of Columbus's arrival in Guanahani, "the Taino population had broken down into small, isolated communities struggling to survive in a dominantly Spanish population" (p. 139). Although Rouse draws attention to some surviving biological, linguistic, and cultural "traits," he concludes that by 1524, the Taino people "had ceased to exist as a separate population group" (p. 169).

As a symptom of this rapid decline, only six pages of Hilary Beckles's general *History of Barbados: From Amerindian Settlement to Nation-State* concerns the Amerindian settlements—the "first Barbadians." The vast majority of Amerindian sites identified in Barbados were small villages, many of them temporary ones on the coast, where the inhabitants were able to use the sea's food resources. Little is known of the first contacts between these people and Europeans, although Beckles may be correct in suggesting that the Amerindians may have been depleted by Spanish slaving raids. By 1541, Barbados reportedly had no indigenous people, and Beckles concludes, "The absence of Amerindian settlements

in the island in 1627 is undoubtedly an important factor in explaining why its English colonists easily surged ahead as the most prosperous in the West Indies during the seventeenth century" (p. 6). Barbados remained a British colony until it became independent in 1966.

A distinguished Barbadian historian at the University of the West Indies, Beckles has previously published monographs focused more narrowly on slave resistance, enslaved women, and white servitude and black slavery in Barbados.¹ In this new historical overview, he emphasizes the dialectic of oppression and resistance: "the persistent struggle for social equality, civil rights and material betterment by blacks, coloureds and some whites, constitutes the central current which flows through the island's history since 1627" (p. xiv). In this regard, Beckles's *History of Barbados* provides an important corrective to the old cliché of Barbados as conservative "Little England."

Beckles delineates the patterns of early colonization up to 1644, when the "sugar revolution" transformed the society as well as the economy. The rise of the planter class and the importation of thousands of enslaved Africans resulted in a prototypical sugar economy and slave society, a model that was imitated with local variations throughout the Caribbean for more than two hundred years. Beckles pays due attention to demographic and economic trends, the differences between poor whites and the white elite, the nature of the slave community, and the emergence of free blacks and free coloureds. Particularly interesting is the relation between the development of an Afro-Barbadian culture, in which the slaves' culture "absorbed elements of Euro-creole ideas and practices" (p. 54), and the patterns of slave control and resistance. Beckles argues that armed struggle and open rebellion gave way largely to nonviolent protest: "The pursuit of upward mobility and ultimate freedom by manumission, therefore, became the dominant response to the slavery system. . . . By the 1750s, a relatively privileged elite of slaves, free blacks and free coloureds, was clearly identifiable in Barbados" (p. 57). But although the proportion of African-born slaves in the population had declined to only 7 percent by 1817, it should not be assumed that the cultural "creolization" of these people necessarily made them more conservative. While the attempt by the elite—white, colored, and black—to degrade African culture certainly resulted in considerable assimilation of European mores, it also had the opposite effect of driving African culture underground, where it became a source of resistance.

The first of the three major slave revolts that took place in the British Caribbean after the abolition of the slave trade occurred in Bar-

1. See, for examples, Beckles's *White Servitude and Black Slavery in Barbados, 1627–1715* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1989); and *Natural Rebels: A Social History of Enslaved Black Women in Barbados* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1989).

bados with Bussa's rebellion in 1816. This islandwide conspiracy was sudden and short-lived. It was quashed within three days, and hundreds of slaves were killed, executed, or sentenced to transportation. Despite, or perhaps because of, the severity of this repression, widespread resentment and resistance continued. Even after amelioration measures to reform slavery after 1823, the efforts of missionaries in churches and schools to make blacks loyal and obedient Christians, and the emancipation process that made the slaves "apprentices" for four years, the transition to so-called freedom did not deliver what it had seemed to promise. The emerging market of free wage labor worked in favor of planter interests, as the planters retained their dominance in the elite community and over the rest of the society.

The second half of Beckles's *History of Barbados* focuses on the "crisis of the free order" after 1838, including the rebellion of 1876 and the decline in sugar prices in the late nineteenth century. Beckles concludes that the strength of the plantocracy in Barbados differed from that in some other parts of the Caribbean: "[T]hough the economic depression led to structural change in the social composition of the plantocracy, it certainly entered the twentieth century as a financially reinforced elite confident in its ability to rule even during the difficult times ahead" (p. 135).

Many poor Barbadians resorted to emigrating to Trinidad, British Guiana, and later Panama, from which their remittances contributed significantly to the island's economy. Working-class communities, strengthened by migrants returning with their savings, created at least 110 friendly societies between 1907 and 1910, and by 1921 one hundred and fifty thousand persons were participating in more than 260 such societies. These "black self-help organizations," along with the landship movement and revivalist churches, contributed to the experience and mobilization of workers and to the struggle for civil and political rights. The 1937 labor rebellion exploded in the context of economic depression and political mobilization and resulted in the development of the organized labor movement and modern political parties.

Grantley Adams based his rise to power on this labor struggle. With the establishment of adult suffrage in 1950 and cabinet government in 1954, Adams became the first premier of Barbados. As a strong advocate of federalism who was also acceptable to the British government, he served as the first and only premier of the British West Indies Federation between 1958 and 1962. Meanwhile, Errol Barrow emerged as premier of Barbados, and in 1966, as the country's first prime minister.

Beckles perceives the heritage of the colonial era not only in the Westminster-style government but also in the compromise between the nation's black majority and white economic power: "a conciliatory arrangement between white corporate power and black political adminis-

trations emerged as the dominant political thrust of the post-independence period" (p. 203). As in the past, Barbadians continue to play a role in the region, within the Caribbean Community and Common Market (CARICOM), and in the cultural and intellectual realm through such distinguished writers as George Lamming and Edward Kamau Brathwaite. Beckles's short history, well-researched and clearly written, is the best single volume that has been published on his country.

The Maroons of Jamaica and Suriname

Three other recent books take up the theme of resistance in Caribbean history with a particular focus on Maroon communities. The topography of Barbados did not permit the development of separate Maroon communities, and consequently, escaping slaves sought shelter on neighboring islands or among the free people of color in Bridgetown. The forested interiors of Jamaica and Suriname, in contrast, provided opportunities for thousands of former slaves and their descendants to establish independent communities beyond the "frontier" of colonial and plantation societies. Mavis Campbell's *The Maroons of Jamaica*, Wim Hoogbergen's *The Boni Maroon Wars in Suriname*, and Richard Price's *Alabi's World* explore facets of this important theme of Caribbean social history, albeit in different ways.

Campbell, a Jamaican historian who teaches at Amherst College, fills a major gap with her detailed history, *The Maroons of Jamaica, 1655–1796: A History of Resistance, Collaboration, and Betrayal*. In undertaking this work, she mined the archives professionally and has written a thorough and coherent account of a complex story, from the earliest evidence of Maroons following the British invasion of 1655, through the shifting relations between the various Maroon communities and the colonial government, to the treaties of 1739 and 1796. Although the Maroons agreed to collaborate with the whites by returning any future runaway slaves and suppressing slave rebellions, hundreds of Maroons were deported nevertheless to Nova Scotia, most of them old men, women, and children.

This "History of Resistance, Collaboration, and Betrayal," as it is described in Campbell's subtitle, has left an ambivalent legacy in Jamaican political culture. On the one hand, the Maroons are viewed as exemplars of resistance to colonialism and slavery, the earliest independence fighters and victims of white deceit. But on the other hand, they became collaborators, co-opted into the colonial system of control in return for their own limited autonomy. Campbell consequently concludes, "We respect them for their fierce independent spirit, but we cannot see them as true revolutionaries or even as reformers, seeking to transform the society from one of servitude to freedom, as happened in Haiti between 1791 and 1804" (p. 13). She insists nevertheless, and quite correctly, that

the history of “their fight for freedom . . . represents another chapter in the history of the human struggle for the extension of freedom—with all the contradictions” (p. 13).

Campbell attempts to address the important questions regarding the Maroons’ culture and social organization, but she recognizes that relying on official documents, with their inevitable ethnocentric bias, means that “we have nothing even close to ethnohistory” (p. 9). This conclusion is disappointing because anthropologists Hoogbergen and Price, Dutch and U.S. scholars respectively, are more successful in this regard. Hoogbergen has written an extraordinarily detailed account of the protracted guerrilla struggles and migrations of the escaped slaves in eighteenth-century Dutch Guiana who became the Boni Maroons. He seems to have traced every relevant document found among letters, journals, court records, and colonial archives. Hoogbergen focuses on the intricate relations between the Boni and Ndjuka Maroons, and among these Maroon groups and the plantation slaves, Amerindians, and Dutch and French colonists. He traces with great care the movements and changing leadership of the Boni Maroons, compares the archival “history” with the Boni myths, and explains the origins of their present settlement patterns and matrilineal system of kinship. Here Hoogbergen’s anthropological training, productively united with a painstaking scrutiny of the documents, results in a fine ethnohistory.

While the detail in *The Boni Maroon Wars in Suriname* is rather overwhelming at times and the translation includes some odd expressions, what emerges is the sense of what Hoogbergen calls “the dawn of a Maroon society,” one with origins in several African cultures “whose synthesis was new and uniquely Afro-American . . . , the result of a creolization process in the New World” (pp. 205–7). These Suriname Maroons exhibit their most characteristic features in their religion, language, and matrilineal kinship system. Hoogbergen attributes their emphases on magical powers and the fertility of women as well as their nomenclature based on the mother’s name to the “permanent migration” caused by the insecurity of their early years. The continual need to protect themselves and to keep women inside the group enhanced the tendency of these communities to practice both obia (religious beliefs and practices including divination and medicine) and matrilineal kinship (pp. 217–18).

Richard Price’s new book about the Saramaka Maroons of Suriname is even more imaginative in its treatment of Maroon culture and ethnohistory. *Alabi’s World* should be studied alongside his earlier work, *First-Time: The Historical Vision of an Afro-American People*,² which presents oral testimonies along with proverbs, songs, and prayers, all evoking

2. Richard Price, *First-Time: The Historical Vision of an Afro-American People* (Baltimore, Md.: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1983).

daily life among the Saramaka between 1685 and 1762, when they won their freedom. In *Alabi's World*, Price creates a multivocal narrative by using four type fonts to indicate different voices in the telling of this eighteenth-century story. Price includes contemporaneous documents of the Dutch colonial soldiers and administrators, whose job was to control and pacify the recently escaped slaves, as well as German Moravian missionaries, who tried to Christianize them. In the third voice, the present-day Saramaka recall in vivid narratives the struggles of their ancestors, and in the fourth voice, Price himself speaks as a guide, analyzing but not always reconciling these different versions of colonial history. The result is an original and absorbing account, a pioneering study that will surely be discussed and imitated for many years.³

Alabi's World is no mere nod toward the fashion of postmodern ethnography but a serious attempt to depict "the fundamental negotiation of meaning between Euro-Americans and Afro-Americans in relationships of differential power" (p. xi). Because these relationships persist in some crucial respects to the present day, what Price is attempting is to evoke a past world, not simply to represent the roots of modern Saramaka culture and social identity but also to demonstrate how "Saramaka historical knowledge is embedded in ongoing social process" (p. xii). How they and we (whoever "we" may be) interpret and understand this historical encounter between displaced Africans and Europeans in colonial America reveals a great deal about who they and we are today, and how we think of each other. Although Price inevitably remains in the privileged authorial role (as we are privileged to be readers), his method challenges readers to confront fundamental assumptions about the distinctions between "myth" and "history" and about the intersections between culture and social identity, on the one hand, and social and political distinctions in the power structure, on the other.⁴

Alabi was one of the first Saramaka to become a Christian. By placing the Moravians' diaries and the modern Saramaka songs and testimonies on an equal footing, Price tries to "level the playing field" and provoke readers into thinking of the Saramaka in "mythohistorical" terms. Their history and ours is not something factual out there to be discovered but a complex narrative that is being continuously socially reconstructed in relation to the lives and environments in which the narrators, including Price himself, live. As Hoogbergen also points out, this relation with the environment, both social and physical, was crucial in the formation of Maroon communities. Price explains, "Saramakas have from the first been specially attuned to living *in* history, both sharply

3. This work has already received much praise, including an award from the Caribbean Studies Association in 1992.

4. In this regard, see also Gary Urton, *The History of a Myth: Pacariqtambo and the Origin of the Inkas* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1990).

aware that their own lives have been affected by the actions of others in the past and conscious of their own accountability toward their descendants. . . . As Saramakas created their social and cultural institutions, during their years of nation building, they were also possessing an unfamiliar environment" (p. 286).⁵

By the time Alabi died in 1820, the Moravians had given up trying to convert the Saramaka. Today, only about four thousand out of a total of twenty-two thousand Saramakas are "nominal Christians." Price concludes that the Saramakas' "general refusal to redefine themselves according to whitefolks' images of them has led to a contemporary landscape that looks quite different from what it would have been had Alabi's minority views won the day" (p. 276). Yet even in those parts of the Americas where the majority of people of African descent became Christian, it would be wrong to assume that they were thereby conforming to "whitefolks' images." The entire thrust of Price's important work is actually to emphasize that the dialectics of this cultural encounter are always far more complicated than a question of assimilation or nonassimilation.

If Mavis Campbell had taken a leaf out of the anthropological book, her approach to interpreting the history and culture of the Jamaican Maroons would have been more fruitful. Despite the fact that she repeatedly refers to her "fieldwork" in the different Maroon communities, not a single Maroon voice is heard in her work. In speaking with Maroons in Scotts Hall and Moore Town, I have found them eager to tell their versions of the past. Campbell surely could have let readers know what they, in their own words, think of their great leaders, Cudjoe and Nanny (pp. 114 and 178), how they relate their possession of land to their group identity (p. 132), what they think of other Maroon communities (p. 252), and what they have to say on the sensitive subject of how they cooperated with the whites to control the slaves (p. 152). Given Campbell's conclusion that "the Maroon story is a study of colonial power" (p. 253), we should hear more of their version of the story.

Sugar, Slavery, and Freedom in Cuba, Puerto Rico, and Jamaica

Three of the works under review here treat the social and economic history of Caribbean societies during different phases of the trajectories of sugar plantations. Laird Bergad's *Cuban Rural Society in the Nineteenth Century* examines the phenomenal expansion of sugar monoculture in Matanzas, the center of this growth, while Teresita Martínez-Vergne focuses in *Capitalism in Colonial Puerto Rico* on the fate of a particular estate, the Central San Vicente, as exemplifying the problems associated with land, labor, and capital during the establishment of *centrales* in the

5. Unfortunately, this and many other insightful commentaries are found among the 153 pages of notes at the end of the book, where they may be lost to many readers.

late nineteenth century. Thomas Holt's *The Problem of Freedom* is ambitious in scope, addressing the relations among race, labor, and politics in Jamaica after emancipation and those between Jamaica and Britain in the century preceding the labor rebellion in 1938. While the focus of each book differs, all of them address social issues in relationship to economic history in the changing context of empire. In Cuba and Puerto Rico, the Spanish empire was declining, becoming supplanted economically and politically by the United States before the end of the nineteenth century. But in Jamaica, the most important West Indian colony of the major world power in the nineteenth century, Britain remained effective until the Second World War. Yet sugar plantations were declining in Jamaica when they were expanding in the Spanish colonies. These variations affected the transformations that occurred within these colonies but also the timing of the changes, as a comparison of these studies makes clear.

Bergad, a historian and the author of a fine study on coffee production in nineteenth-century Puerto Rico,⁶ makes extensive use of statistics and examples drawn chiefly from provincial Cuban archives. He argues convincingly that as long as sugar prices were high, slave-based production was economically viable, particularly on estates employing modern processing technology. The result was a dramatic increase in the number of slaves during the first half of the nineteenth century, when the society was transformed along the lines experienced some two centuries earlier in Barbados.

Slavery was far from being an unprofitable anachronism in the nineteenth century. Capitalist development depended on slave labor, and slave prices reflected market forces, specifically the shifts in the supply of slaves and the price of sugar. For example, the high level of slave imports in the late 1830s drove down the price of slaves in the 1840s, but once imports contracted, slave prices rose in the 1850s. As Bergad points out, "It was only after 1873, when sugar prices declined sharply, that demand for slaves softened and prices plummeted." Meanwhile, planters were expanding their sources of nonslave labor, partly by importing more than 121,000 Chinese contract laborers between 1847 and 1873 (compared with 168,000 Africans during the same period), although sugar production continued to depend heavily on slave labor. Bergad concludes that "while manufacturing and transportation were modernized at considerable cost, traditional methods and forms of labor-force organization stubbornly persisted in the labor-intensive agricultural phase of sugar production. . . . [T]he modernization of processing and transportation made slave labor more efficient and higher yielding in terms of income per slave" (p. 218). Indeed, some forms of nonslave labor, such as the Chinese contract

6. Laird Bergad, *Coffee and the Growth of Agrarian Capitalism in Nineteenth-Century Puerto Rico* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1983).

workers, may be perceived more as “the maintenance of old forms of labor-force organization” (p. 154) in terms of coercion than as a marked transition to a “free labor market.”

Economic growth occurred in this period at the expense of diversified development, and increasing dependence on sugar monoculture intensified the vulnerability of the Cuban economy to price fluctuations in distant markets. Typically, in this classic example of dependent development, a tiny Cuban elite—and subsequently, U.S. merchants and investors—acquired vast wealth while most Cubans remained poor and the rest of the economy remained underdeveloped. Bergad shows clearly how the changing features of a persistent bipolar social structure, during and after slavery, were determined largely by this economic system. Although it was mostly Cuban entrepreneurs who initiated these developments, including control of the slave trade and financing of mill construction, they remained dependent on factors beyond their control: on the prices of sugar and molasses in the world market, on imported technology, including increasingly sophisticated machinery, and on sources of labor, whether from Africa, China, or Spain.

The end of the slave trade in the 1860s and of access to high-yielding virgin soils by the 1870s threatened the sugar industry, but it remained profitable until the sharp decline in sugar prices in the last decades of the century. Bergad observes that the end of slavery in 1886, while producing “theoretical legal equality . . . , did not generally translate into opportunities for upward mobility” for most blacks and mulattos because they remained “at the bottom of the socioeconomic heap” (p. 340). Cuban planters, meanwhile, “collapsed along with the institution that had sustained them” (p. 341), and Cuba soon became dominated by “the most dynamically expanding nation in the world,” the United States (p. 342). Bergad’s illuminating study of Matanzas stands alongside other outstanding contributions to Cuban nineteenth-century history, such as Rebecca Scott’s analysis of emancipation and Robert Paquette’s account of the 1844 conspiracy known as *La Escalera*.⁷

Teresita Martínez-Vergne, a Puerto Rican historian now teaching at Macalester College, contributes a thoughtful and well-written case study of Central San Vicente in northern Puerto Rico. Her analysis helps explain the dynamic relationships among land, capital, labor, and technology and among merchants, landowners, and workers in late-nineteenth-century plantation societies. Martínez-Vergne exemplifies the best of the new generation of historians who are more interested in analyzing underlying changes and continuities in Caribbean culture, society, and

7. Rebecca J. Scott, *Slave Emancipation in Cuba: The Transition to Free Labor, 1860–1899* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1985); Robert L. Paquette, *Sugar Is Made with Blood: The Conspiracy of La Escalera and the Conflict between Empires over Slavery in Cuba* (Middletown, Conn.: Wesleyan University Press, 1988).

economy than in marking out chronologies featuring “watershed events,” such as the invasion of Puerto Rico in 1898. Reflecting an interdisciplinary spirit, she makes appropriate use of economic, sociological, and anthropological techniques and perspectives and thus succeeds in relating the plantation microcosm to the world economy.

Sugar production in Puerto Rico, as in Matanzas, depended heavily on factors beyond the control of the island’s economic leaders. The modernization of production at San Vicente was initiated in 1873 by don Leonardo Igaravidez, a “noble merchant-turned-entrepreneur.” But the capital requirements of the enterprise “could not be satisfied by existing credit mechanisms,” and San Vicente filed for bankruptcy in 1879 (p. 134). Hence although Igaravidez was willing to experiment with scientific land use, sophisticated machinery, and wage labor (all innovations in production in the 1870s), his limited access to adequate capital ruined him. Just twenty years later, the heavily capitalized U.S. sugar centrales succeeded in transforming the Puerto Rican economy. As Martínez-Vergne points out, “with tacit support from the new metropolitan government, U.S. corporations appropriated the best lowlands from Puerto Rican peasants, thus controlling the supply of cane and labor in fields and factories. U.S. firms also enjoyed control of the market through political connections and of credit through highly developed structures of capital investment” (p. 135). Despite all these advantages, however, the success of this U.S.-sponsored sugar economy lasted a mere thirty years.

Martínez-Vergne places *Capitalism in Colonial Puerto Rico* in a wider Caribbean perspective by comparing the history of Central San Vicente with the establishment of centrales—and the failure to establish them—on other islands. Her analysis of San Vicente’s “failure to establish a system of wage labor” is most interesting (p. 102). Puerto Rico was never a “slave society” to the same degree as other sugar colonies: the peak of fifty-one thousand slaves in 1846 represented less than 12 percent of the population.⁸ Nonetheless, elements like paternalism, coercion, “apprenticeship,” indebtedness, and worker resistance defined the nature of labor relations after emancipation in Puerto Rico as elsewhere. Martínez-Vergne’s study of the failure of San Vicente should be read by Caribbeanists and also by Latin Americanists interested in plantation societies and the vicissitudes of dependent capitalist development in the world market economy. Her fine book, like Bergad’s, illuminates the problems of development in dependent export-oriented economies in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

Thomas Holt, Professor of American History at the University of Chicago, divides *The Problem of Freedom: Race, Labor, and Politics in Jamaica*

8. James L. Dietz, *Economic History of Puerto Rico: Institutional Change and Capitalist Development* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1986), 36.

and Britain, 1832–1938 into four main parts, bracketed by a prologue and epilogue. He describes emancipation as “a moment of truth in which the internal contradictions of classical liberalism stood exposed,” contradictions that he observes in the “new conservatism” in the United States (p. xix). Holt’s main focus is exploring what “freedom” meant for the former slaves of Jamaica, “both as an idea and as a reality,” and how this differed from the freedom defined by Jamaican planters and British policymakers and officials. When slavery was supplanted by “free labor,” new forms of coercion, both “ideological and systemic,” were employed to control legally free workers (p. xvii). Consequently, “the struggle to define the content of freedom was at bottom a contest for social power, a struggle at once intellectual and political, social and economic” (p. xxi). While this point is certainly not original (I have discussed it myself in relation to the whole British Caribbean⁹), Holt explores it in great detail in relation to the “politics of everyday life” in Jamaican society and British ideology.

In the first part, entitled “The Mighty Experiment,” Holt examines the meaning of freedom not as a problem of philosophy but in relation to the specific transition from slavery, through apprenticeship, to the free labor society. In so doing, he explores the debates and policies of British policymakers and Jamaican planters and also explores the role of the slaves, whose massive revolt commencing in 1831 unnerved Jamaican whites and hastened passage of the abolition bill in the British Parliament in 1833.

Part Two, “The Free Labor Economy,” analyzes the ongoing struggle between the planters, who as former slave owners were used to coercing their laborers, and the former slaves, who sought in various ways to make their legal freedom a reality. This struggle emerged “when the planters’ insistence upon control confronted the laborers’ insistence upon independence” (p. 174). The former slaves understandably resented and resisted anything that smacked of slavery. Plenty of evidence shows that while the former slaves sought ongoing and expanded access to provision grounds, they were also willing to sell some of their labor to the estates, provided that wages and conditions were satisfactory. When they left the sugar estates, it was often in reaction to coercive planter tactics. Holt appropriately conceives of the former slaves not as “peasants” or “prole-

9. See my “Systems of Domination after Slavery: The Control of Land and Labor in the British West Indies after 1838,” *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 23, no. 4 (1981):591–619; “Reply to William A. Green’s ‘The Perils of Comparative History,’” *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 26, no. 1 (1984):120–25; and Bolland, “The Politics of Freedom in the British Caribbean,” in *The Meaning of Freedom: Economics, Politics, and Culture after Slavery*, edited by Frank McGlynn and Seymour Drescher (Pittsburgh, Pa.: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1992), 113–46. See also Woodville K. Marshall, “The Post-Slavery Labour Problem Revisited,” 1990 Elsa Goveia Memorial Lecture (Mona, Jamaica: University of the West Indies, 1991). None of these works are cited in Holt’s extensive bibliography.

tarians" but as both, "an unfinished proletariat, a semi-peasantry" (p. 174).¹⁰ A point that Holt seems to miss, however (and one made by Walter Rodney in relation to Guyanese workers¹¹), is that the former slaves' increased access to a livelihood independent of the estates gave them more bargaining power in negotiating wages and working conditions on the estates. This outcome makes the relation between their various economic activities and the so-called "push" and "pull" factors that contributed to the emergence of a peasantry even closer and more complex than Holt describes. Nevertheless, I agree wholeheartedly that this power struggle should not be thought of merely in economic terms. As Holt concludes, "the thread uniting their diverse roles into one fabric was the freed people's struggle to control the nature, meaning, and rewards not only of their work but of their lives. They sought to build not just a free labor economy but a free society. They sought to be not just free laborers but a free people" (p. 176).¹²

In Part Three, "The Political Economy of Freedom," Holt explores the contradictions of liberal democratic ideals, on the one hand, and racism and imperialism, on the other.¹³ The theory and practice of liberal democracy diverged in Jamaica because the black majority posed a potential political threat to the planter elite and colonial state power. Although "the black electorate never even remotely approached its potential nor even posed a viable threat" (p. 216), the white elite and British officials, fearing "black power" in Jamaica, agreed to restrict suffrage and to raise qualifications for membership of the Jamaican Assembly in order to exclude most voters. In 1859 a ten-shilling poll tax on all voters reduced the number of voters and of black and brown representatives in the Assembly. In the 1860s, social tensions in the colony were exacerbated by a depressed economy, disputes over access to land, and an increasing burden of taxation on smallholders and poor working Jamaicans. In Jamaica as in African-American communities elsewhere, the cultures of free communities have been rooted in slave resistance and have evolved around control of land and the local authority of their churches. The Morant Bay rebellion of 1865, led by small farmer and Native Baptist preacher Paul Bogle, exemplifies this tradition of "resistant response" to

10. This point was made many years ago in an article not cited by Holt. See Richard Frucht, "A Caribbean Social Type: Neither 'Peasant' nor 'Proletarian,'" *Social and Economic Studies* 13, no. 3 (1967):295–300.

11. Walter Rodney, "Plantation Society in Guyana," *Review* 4 (1981):643–66 (published by the Fernand Braudel Center at SUNY, Binghamton); as cited in Francisco A. Scarano, "Labor and Society in the Nineteenth Century," in *The Modern Caribbean*, edited by Franklin W. Knight and Colin A. Palmer (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1989), 69.

12. This point was made in similar terms at a conference that Holt and I attended at the University of Pittsburgh in 1988. See Bolland, "The Politics of Freedom," 138–43.

13. A fine study of these aspects of society in Guyana (not cited by Holt) is Brian L. Moore, *Race, Power, and Social Segmentation in Colonial Society: Guyana after Slavery, 1838–1891* (New York: Gordon and Breach, 1987).

the impositions of the plantation system and colonialism.¹⁴ The millenarian aspects of this “war of the races,” as it was perceived by both sides, should not obscure the fact that it was really a limited local rebellion. Nevertheless, the viciousness with which it was suppressed and the fact that it occasioned the imposition of more direct Crown Colony rule via abolition of the Jamaican Assembly have given this event the appearance of a watershed in Jamaican political history.

In the final part of *The Problem of Freedom*, entitled “The Road from Morant Bay,” Holt studies the fragile success of peasant proprietorship and the “making of the Jamaican working class” during the rise of the fruit trade and the reorganization of the sugar industry. In his view, “These transformations provided the tinder ignited by the social crisis of the Depression years, leading to the conflagration of 1938” (p. xxv), the labor rebellion that prompted another reevaluation of British colonial policy. Considering the wealth of published material already available on the origins of the 1938 labor rebellion,¹⁵ Holt’s account seems rather slim, although his analysis is consistent with his overall purpose.

While I agree that the making of freedom is “a constant struggle” in the political and ideological sense, its meaning does not remain the same. The changing meaning of freedom lies not in a supposedly universal philosophical abstraction but in specific sociohistorical contexts. It is curious that a historian as sophisticated as Holt would assert that “After a century-long struggle for freedom, Afro-Jamaicans confronted new forces on new terrain, yet the fundamental structure of the contest—the combatants, the ideological content and discourse—remained much the same” (p. xxv). This interpretation depends on what is meant by “fundamental structure.” But if, as Holt rightly states, “defining freedom was part of the politics of everyday life” (p. xxv), then such politics affects the forces and terrain of that struggle. In short, Jamaica and its interrelations with the world were not the same in 1939 as in 1838, any more than they are the same today as they were fifty years ago. To say that freedom is a “moving target” is to assert not only the continuity of the struggle but also that its meaning is being continually reconceived. To historicize the “problem of freedom,” then, historians must explore the changes as well as the continuities in its conceptualization and practice. The fact that Holt raises such profound and central questions makes his thoughtful book worth careful study, but scholars with a comparative interest in

14. On the relation of “resistant response” to the process of cultural development in the Caribbean, see, for example, Sidney W. Mintz, *Caribbean Transformations* (Chicago, Ill.: Aldine, 1974), 131–79; and Jean Besson, “Freedom and Community: The British West Indies,” in *The Meaning of Freedom*, 183–219.

15. These include a study (not cited by Holt) by one of the chief Jamaican labor leaders of the time. See Richard Hart, *Rise and Organise: The Birth of the Workers and National Movements in Jamaica (1936–1939)* (London: Karia, 1989).

the process of emancipation may well wish that the book itself was more explicitly comparative.

Tendencies in Current Caribbean Research

Although the eight books reviewed here were not selected as a representative sample of current Caribbean research, they do illustrate some of the predominant tendencies. First, they build on and contribute to the fine tradition of Caribbean scholarship that has been established over several decades. Regardless of their differences in scope and style, these studies are all thoroughly professional and valuable contributions.

Second, they suggest the contradictory nature of research trends. On the one hand is a tendency, reflecting the training received in more traditional academic circles and the need to find novel subjects, for the focus of research to narrow increasingly to smaller units of analysis and more specific and limited topics. Although it may have been hard thirty years ago to get books published on the Boni Maroon wars of Suriname or on a single Puerto Rican plantation in the 1870s, a readership for Caribbean studies is now growing. This growing readership results in part from a contradictory tendency: specialized research is now crossing the artificial and traditional disciplinary boundaries in order to understand what is unique and what is more universal in the Caribbean experience. Thus research on the Caribbean, far from being academically peripheral, is often found on the frontiers of new interdisciplinary studies.

These more interdisciplinary approaches that explore the interplay between economic, cultural, political, and demographic factors in Caribbean social history as well as more comparative and global perspectives that place the particular focus of a Caribbean case study within its global context are proving fruitful. This trend is not merely an academic fad but rather the reflection of Caribbean reality itself, in which each part has been increasingly integrated into the whole for over five hundred years and therefore cannot be understood except in reference to its multiple relationships with that whole.

The Caribbean is a distinctive sociocultural region that, despite its great diversity, is united by historical commonalities distinguishing it from other parts of the Americas.¹⁶ Among the features occurring in the Caribbean in a unique configuration are the genocide of the indigenous peoples, the re peopling of the region (first with enslaved Africans and then with indentured Asians employed in sugar production), and the persistence and pervasiveness of colonialism. Many other features follow from these three: the economic dependency and political fragmentation of the region, the widespread cultural influences from Africa, the bipolar

16. See Sidney W. Mintz's classic article, "The Caribbean as a Socio-Cultural Area," *Journal of World History* 9, no. 4 (1966):912–37.

social structures and persistence of racism and authoritarianism, and the centrality of migrations—into, within, and now from the region. While many Caribbean people identify more with Latin America because of shared cultural affinities and economic and political problems, people from the Caribbean constitute, along with Latin Americans, the “new immigrants,” the most rapidly growing minority within the United States. For many reasons, then, current research on the Caribbean, as exemplified by these fine books, should be closely followed by Latin Americanists—and, indeed, by Americanists in general.