

THE TERRIBLE GREEN MONSTER:  
Recent Literature on Sugar, Coffee,  
and Coerced Labor in the Caribbean

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- BETWEEN SLAVERY AND FREE LABOR: THE SPANISH-SPEAKING CARIBBEAN IN THE NINETEENTH CENTURY.* Edited by MANUEL MORENO FRAGINALS, FRANK MOYA PONS, and STANLEY L. ENGERMAN. (Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1985. Pp. 292. \$30.00.)
- BITTER SUGAR: SLAVES TODAY IN THE CARIBBEAN.* By MAURICE LEMOINE. Translated from the French by ANDREA JOHNSTON. (Chicago: Banner Press, 1985. Pp. 308. \$9.95.)
- COFFEE AND THE GROWTH OF AGRARIAN CAPITALISM IN NINETEENTH-CENTURY PUERTO RICO.* By LAIRD W. BERGAD. (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1983. Pp. 242. \$27.50 cloth, \$14.50 paper.)
- CRISIS AND CHANGE IN THE INTERNATIONAL SUGAR ECONOMY, 1860–1914.* Edited by BILL ALBERT and ADRIAN GRAVES. (Norwich and Edinburgh: ISC Press, 1984. Pp. 381. \$16.80.)
- JAMAICA AND THE SUGAR WORKER COOPERATIVES: THE POLITICS OF REFORM.* By CARL HENRY FEUER. (Boulder, Colo., and London: Westview Press, 1985. Pp. 219. \$19.50.)
- PLANTATIONS, PEASANTS, AND STATE: A STUDY OF THE MODE OF SUGAR PRODUCTION IN GUYANA.* By CLIVE Y. THOMAS. (Los Angeles: Center for Afro-American Studies, University of California, Los Angeles, and the Institute of Social and Economic Research, University of the West Indies, 1984. Pp. 214. \$26.00 cloth, \$13.95 paper.)
- SLAVE EMANCIPATION IN CUBA: THE TRANSITION TO FREE LABOR, 1860–1899.* By REBECCA J. SCOTT. (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1986. Pp. 319. \$44.00 cloth, \$13.95 paper.)
- SWEETNESS AND POWER: THE PLACE OF SUGAR IN MODERN HISTORY.* By SIDNEY W. MINTZ. (New York: Penguin Books, 1985. Pp. 320. \$20.00.)

Sugar, coerced labor, and foreign economic influence have dominated Caribbean society ever since Christopher Columbus arrived half a millennium ago bearing the gift of the “terrible green monster”—sugar-

cane. This interdependent relationship has in many ways cursed present-day inhabitants of the circum-Caribbean, condemning them to repeat the errors of their forebears while they search for alternatives for a more promising future. Recently published books from a variety of disciplines chronicle the islands during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, and the unsurprising theme of their cumulative lament is the unhappy union of sugar, forced labor, and external economic control. Half the works deal with the crucial last decades of the nineteenth century, when these entangled factors underwent major changes; the remainder examine the imposing problems facing the islands today.

The early history of colonialism, slavery, and sugar in the islands is a remarkable tale. As Sidney Mintz notes in *Sweetness and Power*, the colonial sugar plantation was the enterprise that most closely resembled a bona fide industrial factory in the early modern world. Yet this rudimentary industrial enterprise remained relatively stagnant until the middle of the nineteenth century, when sugar planters confronted a crisis triggered by growing uncertainty over the future of slavery, an unstable international sugar market, the phasing out of mercantilistic protectionist policies, and the vagaries of wars and politics in the Old World and the New. Traditional ways consequently yielded to a renaissance in every aspect of the sugar industry, with the notable exception of cane cultivation.

*The Late Nineteenth Century: Adaptation in the Face of Change*

Manuel Moreno Fraginals, historian laureate of the Cuban sugar mill (*ingenio*), has singled out the period from 1860 to 1890 as a truly revolutionary epoch for the sugar industry worldwide.<sup>1</sup> Sweeping changes altered every aspect of the industry during these three pivotal decades. Much recent scholarship has focused on these alterations, and although important historiographical and theoretical disagreements have emerged over key issues like the relationship between technological change and the abolition of slavery, a consensus is evolving as to the causes of these changes and their far-reaching political, economic, and social effects.

Examining many of these changes is *Crisis and Change in the International Sugar Economy, 1860–1914*, which grew out of an international conference held in Edinburgh in September 1982. Nineteen contributors (eleven focusing on Latin America) examine sugar producers in such disparate locales as Queensland, Egypt, Natal, Hawaii, Argentina, and the Balkans, discussing a variety of problems confronting specific regions during this period. The focal point for the seven-page introduction by editors Bill Albert and Adrian Graves is the 1884 glut in the sugar market, when cane's erstwhile nemesis, the subsidized European

sugar beet, first garnered more than half of the world market. Although the editors list many important changes in the industry, their introduction does little more than summarize the contributions to the volume. The lack of a systematic synthesis of the papers and a microscopic typeface that taxes even the best eyes obscure some useful essays. Several of the Latin American essays merit mentioning: Christian Schnakenbourg surveys the transition from sugar estate to central factory; Kusha Haraksingh details the growing concentration of wealth in Trinidad; Michael Gonzales and Albert (Peru), Rebecca Scott (Cuba), and Arturo Warman (Mexico) examine the trying circumstances for sugar workers during this period of flux; James Wessman discusses the population dynamics of two Spanish-speaking islands and raises some interesting theoretical perspectives; and Donna Guy succinctly describes how the roller-coaster sugar market negatively influenced marginal producers such as those in Tucumán, Argentina.

Although the editors and conference organizers are to be commended for bringing together such a distinguished coterie of specialists, the papers are so geographically specific that the anthology contributes only marginally to understanding the international sugar economy. For example, although it is assumed that Europe's mercurial growth in beet-sugar production came at the direct expense of the Caribbean economy, an overview of the international sugar trade is lacking. Fortunately, readers can find an excellent discussion of this topic in a lucid essay by Moreno Fragnals in another anthology under review here, *Between Slavery and Free Labor*. He insightfully details how protectionist measures locked Caribbean producers out of the lucrative European market. He also describes major changes in marketing this commodity that only amplified the dependence of island growers and underscored the imbalanced terms of trade between Caribbean sugar producers and the international financial community.

Moreover, even when cane production increased, not all islands adapted to the rapidly changing sugar economy. How was it that Cuban industry flourished while the Puerto Rican sugar industry declined? What impact did political considerations have on the sugar industry in Cuba, Puerto Rico, and the Dominican Republic? *Between Slavery and Free Labor* speaks to these questions and emphasizes the impact that the uneven growth of Caribbean sugar had on working conditions in the Hispanophone islands. This useful anthology, which grew out of the "Conference on Problems of Transition from Slavery to Free Labor in the Caribbean," held in Santo Domingo in June 1981, brings the work of several prominent Cuban, Dominican, and Puerto Rican specialists to a North American audience for the first time. Edited by Moreno Fragnals, Dominican Frank Moya Pons, and Stanley Engerman, a North American specialist on slavery, this eclectic set of essays includes the

already mentioned overview of numerous changes in the sugar industry by Moreno Fraginals, Marxist interpretations of the impact of industrial capitalism on the Cuban sugar industry by Fé Iglesias García and Francisco López Segrera, and stimulating essays on the relationships among capitalism, labor, and agrarian structures in each of the three islands during the late nineteenth century. A comparative essay by Herbert Klein and Engerman and a brief epilogue by Sidney Mintz complete the volume.

Such a formidable cast of scholars emphasizes the historiographical significance of this conference and anthology. *Between Slavery and Free Labor* features two schools of thought that have had little opportunity for dialogue. Caribbean Marxist historians interested in the impact of capitalism on agrarian and social structures converse with North American specialists who, influenced by recent slave studies in the United States, ask key questions about the workers' ability to adapt to changing circumstances—be they the slaves studied by Rebecca Scott or the Jamaican migrants discussed by Franklin Knight.<sup>2</sup>

A minor disappointment with this anthology is that the concluding comparative essay by Klein and Engerman fails to discuss the preceding eleven papers. Instead they present a comparative overview of the transition from slave to free labor (or perhaps “semifree labor” would be a more appropriate description). Klein and Engerman point out that generalizing about the transition from slave to free labor is hazardous for a number of reasons. Ecology, the demographic makeup of the population, land-labor ratios, government policies, and world-market conditions all played roles in determining the kind of coerced labor system that developed on each island.

Two points of comparison can nonetheless be noted for all nineteenth-century sugar societies. First, former slaves wanted control over their own labor and access to land for producing food and other crops. Given the choice, former slaves simply withdrew from cane cultivation. Even though planters knew that slavery would inevitably be abolished long before its denouement, they also understood the realities and the rhythms of the sugar factory. Discipline was everything, and former slaves had to be coerced to work by planters and state authorities. Although emancipation gave slaves the right to choose their living conditions, too much was at stake for planters and their political peers to permit unbridled freedom. As Sidney Mintz relates in his concluding epilogue to *Between Slavery and Free Labor*, the progression to freedom was “circuitous and uneven”—formal emancipation was just one step on the path toward liberty. Sugar and coercion were inextricably linked.

Second, abolition took place during a time of rapid growth and modernization of the industry (except in Puerto Rico and Jamaica), which necessitated greater economies of scale, and planters conse-

quently had to utilize different kinds of laborers to maintain production at all costs. Even before the torturously slow process of abolition was completed in the Caribbean (by the mid-1880s), realistic island planters were fashioning a diverse work force of rural proletarians, migrant workers from other Caribbean islands, Chinese contract workers, debt peons, Maya Indian prisoners-of-war, Indian indentured servants, hired slaves, and “free” wage earners. This array of laborers, all working under different sets of rules and regulations, significantly affected the kinds and levels of social tensions on the late-nineteenth-century sugar estate.

Not surprisingly, little consensus has emerged among Caribbean (and North American) historians over such charged issues as the abolition of slavery and the transition to alternative forms of coerced labor. The suggestive work of Moreno Fraginals has raised significant questions. *El ingenio* provocatively argues that significant technological changes in the nineteenth century—especially the growth of the central factory or *central*—mandated changes in the labor force, which in turn made emancipation inescapable: “The industrial revolution in the sugar industry also made it necessary to transform labor relations . . . having finally triggered the crisis of the slave system on which the old ingenio had been based.”<sup>3</sup> Moreno Fraginals finds a direct correlation between the technological advances leading to the modernization of the sugar industry and the abolition of Cuban slavery.

This thesis of the incompatibility of slave labor with technology has been challenged by Rebecca Scott in an essay in *Between Slavery and Free Labor* and in her excellent monograph, *Slave Emancipation in Cuba*. Although Scott’s book has a larger agenda than simply refuting Moreno Fraginals’s thesis, the debate is important enough that she spends the better part of two chapters arguing about the relationship between technological change and the abolition of slavery.

Scott owes a large intellectual debt to North American historians of slavery and Reconstruction like Eugene Genovese, Herbert Gutman, and Leon Litwack.<sup>4</sup> She insists that slaves as well as former slaves had the ability to adapt to rapidly changing circumstances and to be active agents in their day-to-day existence. The Cuban rural slaves’ self-definition sought to rationalize their own dependent status in the plantation community. The slaves described by Genovese forged a religion that “taught them to love and value each other, to take a critical view of their masters, and to reject the ideological rationale of their own enslavement”;<sup>5</sup> they also nurtured a paternalistic relationship linking “them as individuals to their oppressors.”<sup>6</sup> But the larger and more impersonal ingenio worked against Cuban slaves forming such intricate relationships with their white masters. According to Scott, Cuban slaves showed themselves instead to be active agents in their daily lives

through their patterns of family interactions, housing arrangements, and individual business transactions: "Slaves could be cheated, yet participate in a money economy. They could be ill-housed, yet struggle to maintain families. They could be treated worse than beasts, yet not become like beasts" (p. 19).

This attempt to humanize Cuban slaves by demonstrating their full range of adaptations to slavery and emancipation is the central focus of Scott's book. In her view, an event like emancipation must now be reexamined because slaves are no longer viewed as passive retainers and victims who accepted the Spanish government's piecemeal strategies in dealing with the crumbling institution of slavery. The role of slaves in the Ten Years' War, the implementation of the politically expedient Moret Law (1870), and the flawed interim system of *patronato* (wardship) between 1880 and 1886 are examined in a rich narrative based on research in manuscript collections in Cuba, Spain, France, England, and the United States. Despite her empathy for the slaves, Scott does not overestimate their ability to influence their future. Planters, rebels, colonial administrators, Spanish politicians, abolitionists, and slaves all play significant roles in Scott's analysis of this protracted struggle.

The heart of *Slave Emancipation in Cuba* is Scott's detailed analysis of the *patronato* system (pp. 141–97). This system sought to indemnify the master (*patrono*) with labor and to provide the former slave (*patrocinado*) with "tutelage." As Scott suggests, *patronato* became a poor substitute for either freedom or slavery. This stopgap measure pleased no one but somehow managed to keep the great sugar engine going, buying time for *patrono* and *patrocinado* alike. This gradualist policy worked to a certain degree. Disruption was kept to a minimum, production was maintained, and, most importantly from the planter's perspective, emancipation did not end discipline in the workplace.

Scott masterfully explains the great efforts made by planters to prevent the loss of moral authority during this calamitous time. Corporal punishment, private rural guards, vagrancy laws, scrip wages, company stores, advances and debts, and subsidized immigration were all useful mechanisms of social control that inhibited the mobility of *patrocinados*. Scott repeatedly mines the rich records of the Spanish junta that oversaw the operation of the *patronato* system and heard the complaints and petitions of *patronos* and *patrocinados*. The result is a compelling narrative of a little-known episode in Cuban history, a time when the Spanish colonial administration struggled to maintain legitimacy while planters and slaves abused the short-lived system of *patronato* for different purposes.

*Slave Emancipation in Cuba* proves that emancipation was a complex affair brought on by the confluence of political, economic, and

social factors in Cuba and Spain. Scott must therefore take exception with Moreno Fraginals's more rigid, deterministic interpretation of the inherent contradictions (ergo, incompatibility) between slave labor and modern technology. Although Scott's reading of *El ingenio* is perhaps more reductionist than my own, she makes valid arguments about the ability of slaves to handle complex machinery in renovated ingenios of the late nineteenth century. As Robert Starobin and others have articulated elsewhere,<sup>7</sup> slaves were used successfully in pre-industrial and industrial settings. More specifically, Scott's rich empirical data for certain sugar districts in Cuba shows that slaves worked in the processing stage throughout this era and that the most modern planters were also the most reluctant to eschew servile labor. The numbers of slaves in productive age groups did not decline dramatically during the transitional decade of the 1870s, at least on larger plantations. Moreover, Scott's evidence demonstrates that "where sugar prospered, slavery persisted" (p. 87). Planters did not repudiate slavery but accommodated themselves instead to changing political, social, and economic conditions by adding a host of different types of laborers to their slave labor forces.

Scott nevertheless recognizes that there is more to Moreno Fraginals's thesis than the presence of slaves in the industrial workplace. She admits that slavery's effects on the larger society might have inhibited economic development, that planters understood that the question was when, not if, and that their main preoccupation was maintaining a sufficient number of *brazos*—whether they were slaves, Chinese contract workers, or wage earners.

A diverse labor force, Scott and Moreno Fraginals agree, was the most distinctive characteristic of the late-nineteenth-century sugar ingenio. Moreno Fraginals believes that it was precisely this diversity that hastened the internal collapse of slavery. He asserts that the mixture of types of workers led to chaos on the estates by creating tensions and class divisions that undermined the tenuous plantation regimen. Planters knew the end of slavery was coming and realized that recently freed slaves would not be overjoyed to continue working on the sugar plantations (planters needed only to look to the British West Indies for a case in point). They therefore rushed to incorporate Chinese contract workers between 1848 and 1874. Moreno Fraginals contends that the "legally free" Chinese workers, who served eight-year contracts and were paid a nominal wage, "permitted the initiation of the process of industrialization of sugar."<sup>8</sup>

Scott counters that Chinese indentured laborers were "virtual slaves." What legal rights the contracts granted them were lost in the exploitative reality of isolated sugar estates. In addition, indentured servants like slaves could not be laid off during the *tiempo muerto*. Scott

contends that these “short-term workers,” bereft of cultural ties and sometimes their loved ones and having little hope of petitioning their grievances, labored under the same brutal conditions as the slaves and hence did not represent a fundamental change in the kind of labor system employed in the sugar districts.

By blurring the real distinction between Chinese contract workers and slaves, however, Scott has implicitly weakened her argument. While a structural similarity exists between slavery and indentured servitude<sup>9</sup> and conditions were intolerable for Chinese and black slaves alike, her characterization of Chinese contract workers as “virtual slaves” obscures the issue with inflammatory rhetoric and inhibits understanding of the complex relationship that meshed distinctive labor types into a brutally effective work force. As Scott subsequently admits, free labor and indentured servitude were economically complementary to slavery but implied significant political risks. The ongoing improvisations of the planter class during this period led to tensions in the labor force that created an “invidious distinction between slaves and Chinese workers” (p. 109). Scott also admits that bringing in “free workers” only enhanced the contradictions and tensions operating in late-nineteenth-century ingenios. Planters had to proceed with transforming their labor force with due care. “It made obvious to slaves the existence of alternatives, created new sources of information and made new alliances . . . possible” (p. 110).

Moreover, the variegated coerced labor system on Cuban sugar estates undermined a fundamental characteristic of plantation life—its isolation. As Scott emphasizes, planters always tried to maintain their estates as physically closed units, to seal off each plantation from outside information that might destabilize the work routine. In a sense, both planters and slaves tried to accommodate themselves to rapid technological changes and the ensuing political struggle for independence in order to make the best of a volatile situation. Scott adds, “[I]n this specific political context, when abolition was already on the agenda, when insurgency was a reality, and when there was division within the white population, innovations and adaptations carried serious risks” (p. 110). Her thoughtful analysis appears to bolster Moreno Fraginals’s contention that the myriad changes of the late nineteenth century altered the fragile balance of traditional ingenios and contributed to a radical change in the social relations of production.

In sum, the debate between Moreno Fraginals and Scott comes down to a question of degree. Moreno Fraginals perceives utter chaos in rural Cuba during the 1870s and 1880s while Scott sees accommodation in the face of instability by the state, planters, and slaves. Moreno Fraginals emphasizes technological change and economic motivation, while Scott asserts, perhaps more convincingly, that a confluence of



factors paved the road to freedom for Cuban slaves. Finally, Moreno Friginals envisions the sugar revolution as having displaced slaves from the processing stage, an interpretation that Scott disputes. More empirical data will help unravel this mystery. For now, all Caribbeanists are the richer because these two schools of thought are engaging in such a provocative historiographical conversation.

### *Coffee Counterpoint*

Fernando Ortiz Fernández's *Contrapunteo cubano del tabaco y el azúcar* lyrically described the complementary relationship between Cuban sugar and tobacco. Any comparison between the two cash crops has its limits because each crop has different requirements of labor, land, capital, and technology. The same may be said of the relationship between Puerto Rican sugar and coffee during the nineteenth century, but the distinctions and the degree of complementarity between these two monocultures offer an interesting basis of comparison.

Cultivation of coffee and sugar has little in common. Coffee was generally grown in the cooler highlands, sugar in the more humid lowlands. Coffee required relatively small capital investment because it could be marketed without having to be processed by industrial equipment. In addition, the economies of scale so essential for profitable sugar production were not necessary for coffee cultivation. It was profitable in Puerto Rico on smaller, family-run farms, which reduced the need for importing labor. Nor did it require the rigid mechanisms of social control described by Francisco Scarano, in his study of sugar plantations in the Ponce district, as part and parcel of sugar estates.<sup>10</sup> Furthermore, coffee can be grown with little sacrifice of food staples because fruit trees are used to shade new coffee bushes, thus limiting costly imports of foodstuffs. Finally, coffee costs less to transport than sugar, further limiting capital requirements.

Despite these obvious differences, Laird Bergad suggests in *Coffee and the Growth of Agrarian Capitalism in Nineteenth-Century Puerto Rico* that sugar and coffee were to some degree complementary crops. Little conflict arose over land for the two staples because the island contained two distinct ecological and economic zones—the southern coastal lowlands for sugar and the western-central highlands for coffee. Espousing a *dependentista* analytical framework, Bergad implies that the parallels between coffee and sugar also extended to the classic boom-and-bust syndrome suffered by most New World exports during the nineteenth century. Bergad convincingly argues that neither promoted long-term growth or diversification and that both were dominated by immigrant elites and foreign markets. The heyday of the island sugar economy occurred during the first half of the century, then coffee replaced sugar

as the dominant staple in the last decades. Ironically, the onerous requirements of sugar cultivation indirectly promoted intra-island migration away from sugar ingenios toward the sparsely populated highlands even during the sugar boom. During the coffee boom, seasonal migration from the sugar zone to the coffee districts complemented highland labor needs. While Bergad acknowledges the limits to this particular nineteenth-century Puerto Rican counterpoint, the limits are suggestive in understanding the relationship between export staples for present-day economic development strategies.

Bergad's study, which is based on notarial and municipal records, is a well-organized regional micro-study of several coffee districts in the highlands of west-central Puerto Rico. The monograph's greatest strength is its description of immigrant elites who dominated the commercial aspects of the industry. Bergad traces several generations of Mallorcan and Corsican families who lent monies to criollo planters, provided marketing facilities, accrued substantial profits, and then retired to the peninsula. These entrepreneurial families preferred to regenerate their ranks through continual migration from extended family networks in Mallorca and Corsica rather than intermarry with local notable families. Bergad suggests that this pattern of immigrant control and minimal reinvestment of coffee-trade profits in the local economy rankled the debt-ridden criollos and sparked a poorly organized movement for independence, the Grito de Lares in 1868. Although he carelessly employs terms like *insurrection* and *revolution* to describe a short-lived uprising easily squelched by Crown authorities, Bergad makes a good case for local class conflict in the highland coffee districts as a motivating force behind creole unhappiness with dominant Spanish merchants.

Bergad also attempts to break new ground in his revisionist analysis of labor conditions in the coffee zone. His characterization of the coffee work force as a rural proletariat distinguishes his work from mainstream Marxist historiography.<sup>11</sup> This entangled and charged topic lies well beyond the scope of the present review. Fortunately, this important subject continues to be debated elsewhere by Puerto Rican and British scholars.<sup>12</sup>

### *Sweetness and Consumption*

Sidney Mintz, the dean of Caribbeanists, has spent his professional lifetime investigating the impact of sugar on the lives of island-dwellers. *Sweetness and Power: The Place of Sugar in Modern History* turns that subject upside down and asks what happened to sugar when it sailed away from the Caribbean and made its way to the stores, work-

places, restaurants, and homes of European and North American consumers. For Mintz, the question is an important corrective to the academic myopia that often “excludes the linkage between metropolis and colony by choosing one perspective and ignoring the other” (p. xvi).

In a creative, synthetic set of essays, Mintz fits the “hub” to the “outer rim,” without losing sight of the important implications of sugar for both supplier and consumer. A brief description of the five integrated essays in *Sweetness and Power* will demonstrate the interdisciplinary breadth and historical scope of this significant work.

Chapter 1 explores the anthropology of food and eating in general and the manner in which consumers became “hooked on the sugar habit.” In Chapter 2, Mintz traces the evolution of sugar production from ancient times to the late nineteenth century, while engaging such important theoretical debates in the literature as the role of the plantation in the colonial economy and its impact on the industrial revolution as well as the place of the slave plantation in the evolution of modern industrial capitalism.

The next theme is consumption and sugar’s long evolution from medicine to condiment to decoration to sweetener to preservative to food. Mintz explores the fascinating story of how the twin colonial staples of tea and sugar became the cornerstones of the English diet. Why tea and sugar? The needs of empire had to be served, and the British had a Ricardian comparative advantage for producing and marketing these products, rather than coffee and chocolate. Sugar’s “treacling” down to puddings, porridges, and breads revolutionized the diet of rich and poor.<sup>13</sup> Mintz is particularly interested in the impact of sugar on the lives of the industrial working classes, the way it enhanced their caloric intake and changed the kinds of foods workers ate, which in turn altered their day-to-day existence.

A chapter on power examines the complicated relationship between the growth of modern capitalism and increased consumption of sugar as well as sugar by-products by the working classes. We learn that the inexpensive sugar of the late nineteenth century came at a time when its demand was ensured by “the factory world and machine rhythms.” The situation was not simply that factory laborers were working harder to produce more, to acquire more, and to emulate the middle and upper classes. Industrialization implied greater constraints on their time, and sugary bakery goods filled the void left by less time to bake foods at home.

Mintz’s tour de force concludes with a brief essay on the place of sugar in today’s world. His discussion of sucrose’s loss of market to high-fructose corn syrup bears directly on present-day Caribbean economies still struggling to overcome the inherent legacy of depen-

dence on sugar monoculture. *Sweetness and Power*, a “pause that refreshes,” creatively gives new meaning to the old adage, “You are what you eat.”

*Twentieth-Century Problems: Peasants and Plantations*

We peasants reject the sugarcane because it is the raw material of slavery of the peasant people. . . . The sugarcane degenerates one, turns one into a beast, and kills! . . . In all these districts one finds the plots of the majority of the peasants threatened by the terrible Green Monster, which is the Great Cane, the God of the landlords.<sup>14</sup>

The peasants of Colombia who fired this political salvo in 1972 expressed in well-chosen, if overly dramatic, words the often bitter, antagonistic relationship between the insatiable, terrible Green Monster, “the God of the landlords,” and the powerless peasants, who struggle heroically to carve out an independent existence on their small tracts of land.<sup>15</sup> Much of modern Caribbean history revolves around the interdependent worlds of the reconstituted peasantry and the sugar economy, and all four of the books under review in this section deal explicitly or implicitly with this conundrum.

Maurice Lemoine’s *Bitter Sugar: Slaves Today in the Caribbean* is a sensationalized journalistic foray into the miserable treatment of Haitian sugar workers in the Dominican Republic during the late 1970s. A journalist for the French paper *Le Progrès de Lyon*, Lemoine originally published this book in France in 1981. Its muckraking eyewitness account leaves the reader a bit dazed at man’s apparent inhumanity to man: the nefarious recruiting of impoverished Haitians for the Dominican sugar harvest (*zafra*) by the regime of Baby Doc Duvalier; the brutality of the dictator’s praetorian guard, the Tonton Macoutes; and the sordid business deals between President Silvestre Antonio Guzmán of the Dominican Republic and Duvalier, including payment by Dominican authorities of a million and a half dollars to the Haitian government in return for Duvalier’s contractual promise to secure fifteen thousand workers for the 1978–79 *zafra* of the Dominican State Sugar Council. Lemoine writes a chilling account of the deprivations that Haitian “kongos” faced in Dominican sugar *bateys*, including nightmarish descriptions of despicable living quarters, brutal working conditions, and racist treatment of Haitians by Dominican supervisors and foremen.

If half of what one reads in *Bitter Sugar* is true, then Lemoine’s characterization of the workers as “today’s slaves” accurately assesses the conditions of Haitians toiling in the Dominican sugar *bateys*. As he freely admits in the preface, Lemoine wrote this seething attack on Haitian and Dominican authorities in great anger. Because Lemoine’s

mudslinging style leaves nothing to the imagination and because he makes little effort to support his contentions, readers are left to ponder the veracity of this bizarre story. This disturbing polemic cries out for an international human-rights investigation of Haitian caneworkers in the Dominican Republic.

Clive Thomas is also committed to caneworkers in the Caribbean, but there ends the comparison between *Bitter Sugar* and Thomas's *Plantations, Peasants, and State*. Professor of Economics and Director of the Institute of Development Studies at the University of Guyana in Georgetown, Thomas has devoted much of his life to the struggles of caneworkers, first as an economic advisor for two unions in Guyana and then as a consultant to the International Labour Office in the late 1970s. The author of several important works on sugar and underdevelopment in the Caribbean, Thomas concisely analyzes the problems and pitfalls of the Burnham government's 1976 nationalization of the sugar industry in Guyana.<sup>16</sup>

This case study of the relationships among the state, sugar monoculture, and the peasantry of modern Guyana charts the historical development of the sugar industry and the role assumed by the state in its operation. Structurally, Guyana resembles most Caribbean sugar economies. The plantation has been its dominant mode of production since the Dutch and British first colonized the mainland. As occurred in other sugar societies in the circum-Caribbean during the nineteenth century, Guyana experienced an evolution in the social relations of production as slaves were first replaced by Indian indentured immigrants, then by "free" wage workers. Again consistent with its neighbors, Guyana developed a reconstituted peasantry after abolition, despite restraints placed on it by colonial authorities. A cooperative "village movement" began in the 1850s, but for various reasons, peasants were forced to enter the cash economy and work as seasonal and full-time laborers on nearby sugar plantations. The result was a fragmenting of peasant holdings, the destruction of communal forms of landownership, and the development of what Thomas calls "an aggressive individualism," which still characterizes the peasants of Guyana today.

Structural similarities between Guyana and other sugar isles continued during the first half of the twentieth century, as several dominant multinationals (chiefly Booker McConnell) drove out smallholders, rationalized the labor market through piecework and seasonal employment, and introduced capital-intensive equipment to modernize the industry. By 1976 Booker McConnell controlled 80 percent of the sugar market in Guyana.

The beginnings of a two-pronged union movement began during the depression in Guyana, when company and independent unions

fought as tensions grew in employer-worker relations. Racial antagonism between Indians and blacks and the struggle for independence during the 1950s and 1960s culminated in the nationalization of the sugar industry in 1976. Workers who had advocated state control of the industry in hopes of improving their working conditions, benefits, and pay were sorely disappointed by the state's adversarial role after nationalization. The result has been an endless cycle of agitation, strikes, commissions of inquiry, and disputed settlements. Thomas laments that since 1976 the Guyanese sugar industry—a dismal brand of state capitalism—has suffered a perpetual crisis in industrial relations. Sugar estates remain essentially bastions of authoritarianism as workers are pitted now against bureaucrats, instead of corporate interests. The caneworkers have little real input into the decision-making process.

Furthermore, the state monopoly on processing, marketing, transport, and other facets of the sugar industry has done little to remedy the historically antagonistic relationship between Guyanese peasants and the plantations. If anything, state control of the sugar economy has only worsened the plight of the marginalized peasantry. Thomas advocates as an alternative a self-reliant model calling for diversification of sugar production and requiring the energized participation of the Guyanese.

*Plantations, Peasants, and State* relates the legacy of plantation monoculture to contemporary underdevelopment in Guyana. Blending empirical analysis with a useful conceptual framework, Thomas offers a telling criticism of Burnham's nationalization program as well as thoughtful suggestions for Guyana's future. Although some will be put off by the author's ideological commitment, this monograph has much to offer Caribbean development strategists.

If the radical nationalization of the sugar industry in Guyana proved unsuccessful where the state played an all-encompassing role, one can understand why a "quick-fix" reform, like the one attempted by the government of Michael Manley's People's National Party (PNP) in Jamaica (1972–1979), also fared poorly. Political scientist Carl Henry Feuer examines Manley's agrarian reform program, which turned over forty thousand acres of prime canefields to self-managed sugar cooperatives. Feuer's approach in *Jamaica and the Sugar Worker Cooperatives* differs from that of Thomas in being micro and political, detailing the changes that several sugar estates underwent during the short-lived reform. Whereas Thomas's study centers on the historical dimensions of plantation dependency and the importance of macroeconomic structures in forestalling the development of Guyana, Feuer is more concerned with the interdependence of progressive politicians, bureaucrats, and militant caneworkers during an uncertain period of change.

Manley, a former union leader, understood that something had to be done to revitalize the sugar industry. The plantation symbolized Jamaican neocolonialism and therefore became a major target for the fledgling regime. A chief aim of Manley's program was to mobilize caneworkers in order to spur their participation in transforming the social relations of production in the Jamaican countryside.

As in Guyana, theory and praxis did not converge. Early plans for a centralized management model were opposed by disenchanting sugar workers. The union of the Sugar Workers Coordinating Council (SWCC) mobilized and pressured the government to decentralize the cooperative process. In 1974–75 the government complied with the demands of the SWCC, but bureaucratic misadventures, poor productivity, and divisions within the ruling PNP spelled disaster for the cooperatives.

Feuer emphasizes the fracturing of PNP unity during the last years of Manley's administration as a key factor in the demise of the cooperative movement. What had been an essentially bourgeois liberal party, before Manley's populist victory in 1972, was pushed further along the path to democratic socialism by the more progressive elements of the PNP. The middle-class core of the party felt that things were moving too far too fast. Feuer contends that commitment to meaningful reform within the party was never strong. Furthermore, an anti-socialist campaign waged in the media contributed to the government's decision to demobilize the cooperatives. Consequently, caneworkers were never really given a chance to adjust to the reform.

While *Jamaica and the Sugar Worker Cooperatives* superbly details the failure of the sugar cooperatives at the grass roots, the work is too narrowly focused to explain properly the implications of this experiment for the democratic reform model of economic development that Manley espoused. The formidable impact of external forces that hamstrung Manley's policies are given a quick once-over by Feuer. Jamaica's debts, the International Monetary Fund's austerity program, and mounting U.S. pressure are all glossed over in the final chapter. Notwithstanding these minor shortcomings, Feuer's book on the sugar cooperatives perceptively illustrates the difficulties inherent in successfully transforming plantation monoculture.

The peasant-plantation dichotomy conveyed so forcefully in the Colombian peasants' rejection of sugarcane as "the material of slavery" remains unresolved throughout the Caribbean. As alternative models are applied to the lingering problems created by the terrible green monster—its bittersweet effect on marginalized peasants, its appetite for coerced labor, and the negative impact of the larger market economy on local economic sovereignty—social scientists would do well to consult

the historical, theoretical, and pragmatic analyses offered in this small sample of recent literature on the Caribbean.

NOTES

1. Manuel Moreno Fraginals, "Plantations in the Caribbean: Cuba, Puerto Rico, and the Dominican Republic in the Late Nineteenth Century," in Moreno Fraginals et al., *Between Slavery and Free Labor*, 3–21. Another useful survey of some of the radical changes of the sugar industry during the nineteenth century is Christian Schnakenbourg's "From the Sugar Estate to Central Factory: The Industrial Revolution in the Caribbean (1840–1905)," in Albert and Graves, *Crisis and Change*, 83–93.
2. This encouraging dialogue is directly attributable to Moreno Fraginals, whose prize-winning three-volume masterpiece has captured the imagination of Caribbeanists. Moreno Fraginals's original version of *El ingenio* was published in 1964, then was translated in 1976 and published as *The Sugarmill: The Socioeconomic Complex of Sugar in Cuba, 1760–1860* by Monthly Review Press. In 1978 a completely revised three-volume edition was published in Cuba. See *El ingenio: complejo económico social cubano del azúcar*, 3 vols. (Havana, Editorial de Ciencias Sociales, 1978). For a stimulating review of the revised work, see Franklin W. Knight, "The Caribbean Sugar Industry and Slavery," *LARR* 18, no. 2 (1983):219–29.
3. This quotation by Moreno Fraginals is cited in Rebecca J. Scott, *Slave Emancipation in Cuba*, 77.
4. Eugene D. Genovese, *Roll, Jordan, Roll: The World the Slaves Made* (New York, 1974); Herbert Gutman, *The Black Family in Slavery and Freedom, 1750–1925* (New York, 1976); and Leon Litwack, *Been in the Storm So Long: The Aftermath of Slavery* (New York, 1979).
5. Genovese, *Roll, Jordan, Roll*, 6.
6. *Ibid.*, 5.
7. Robert S. Starobin, *Industrial Slavery in the Old South* (New York, 1970). See Scott's discussion in *Slave Emancipation in Cuba*, 26–28.
8. Moreno Fraginals, *El ingenio*, 1:308–9; cited in Scott, *Slave Emancipation in Cuba*, 28.
9. For a more rigorous definition of slavery, see Orlando Patterson, *Slavery and Social Death* (Cambridge, Mass., 1982), chap. 1.
10. Francisco A. Scarano, *Sugar and Slavery in Puerto Rico: The Plantation Economy of Ponce, 1800–1850* (Madison, 1984). See also Andrés A. Ramos Mattei, *La hacienda azucarera: su crecimiento y crisis en Puerto Rico (siglo XIX)* (San Juan, 1981).
11. For example, see Angel G. Quintero Rivera, *Conflicto de clase y política en Puerto Rico* (Río Piedras, 1976); and Quintero Rivera, "Background to the Emergence of Imperialist Capitalism in Puerto Rico," in *Puerto Rico and Puerto Ricans: Studies in History and Society*, edited by Adalberto López and James Petras (New York, 1974), 87–117.
12. Bergad and Tom Brass have been carrying on a running debate on labor conditions in Puerto Rico. See Bergad, "Coffee and Rural Proletarianization in Puerto Rico, 1840–1898," *Journal of Latin American Studies* (hereafter cited as *JLAS*) 15, pt. 1 (May 1983):83–100; Brass, "Coffee and Rural Proletarianization: A Comment on Bergad," *JLAS* 16, pt. 1 (May 1984):143–52; Bergad, "On Comparative History: A Reply to Tom Brass," *JLAS* 16, pt. 1 (May 1984):153–56; and Brass, "Free and Unfree Labour in Puerto Rico during the Nineteenth Century," *JLAS* 18, pt. 1 (May 1986):181–94.
13. *Treacle* is the English term for molasses.
14. Peasants' broadsheet cited in Michael T. Taussig, *The Devil and Commodity Fetishism in South America* (Chapel Hill, N.C., 1980), 93–94.
15. Caribbeanists have long debated the impact of the plantation on modern development, especially the adversarial relationship between the dual worlds of the sugar monoculture and the peasantry. For two contrasting views, see George L. Beckford, *Persistent Poverty: Underdevelopment in Plantation Economies of the Third World* (New York, 1972); and G. B. Hagelberg, *The Caribbean Sugar Industries: Constraints and Opportunities* (New Haven, 1974). Knight includes an interesting discussion of the debate in "The Caribbean Sugar Industry," 219–22.



16. See also Clive Y. Thomas, *The Threat and the Promise: An Assessment of the Impact of Technological Development in the High Fructose Corn Syrup and Sucro-Chemical Industries* (Trinidad, 1982); idem, *Dependence and Transformation: The Economics of the Transition to Socialism* (New York, 1974); idem, *Sugar Economics in a Colonial Situation: A Study of the Sugar Industry in Guyana* (Georgetown, Guyana, 1970); and idem, *Monetary and Financial Arrangements in a Dependent Monetary Economy* (Mona, Jamaica, 1965).