

BOOK REVIEWS

BERGAD, LAIRD W. *The Comparative Histories of Slavery in Brazil, Cuba, and the United States*. [New Approaches to the Americas.] Cambridge University Press, Cambridge [etc.] 2007. xiv, 314 pp. Ill. £45.00; \$80.00. (Paper: £15.99; \$22.99); doi:10.1017/S0020859010000076

For far too long the history of slavery in Anglo-Saxon scholarship has been dominated by the experience of North America and of the British Caribbean; and this despite the fact that the South Atlantic slave trade flourished almost independently of that in the North Atlantic and that the volume on the Southern routes was massive. For example, between 1550 and 1850 almost 40 per cent of all Africans forcibly transported to the New World to work as slaves ended up in Brazil, which is almost ten times as many slave cargoes as landed in the USA and almost as many as all those shipped to North America and the Caribbean combined. Moreover, after relatively successful British initiatives to destroy the North Atlantic slave trade after 1808, that in the South Atlantic thrived, driven by the demands of coffee cultivation. Thus 55 per cent of all slaves disembarking in the Americas between 1800 and 1850 found themselves in Brazil. Moreover, as Laird Bergad reminds us, in 1600, when there were no African slaves in the Caribbean or North America, over 200,000 had already arrived in the Spanish and Portuguese territories of the New World. So this new study, which serves to rectify the balance and destroys many myths in the process, is especially welcome.

The work constitutes an invaluable and systematic comparison of racial slavery in Brazil, Cuba, and the United States by an author who has already conducted impressive primary research in Puerto Rico, Cuba, and Brazil. The three areas of this latest study deserve common treatment, sharing important characteristics. They were amongst the first to establish slave systems based upon imported African labour; and slave systems spread to almost every region of their territories. Moreover, slavery persisted longer here than in most of the Americas, being brought to an end by a Civil War in the USA and abolished only in the 1880s in Cuba (1886) and Brazil (1888).

After an admirably clear introductory narrative of the origins of slavery in the three countries, the book proceeds by organizing material into thematic chapters, bringing together information from each of the countries according to the central theme. In virtually all the chapters this structured comparative approach pays dividends and reveals just how dangerous it is to make generalizations about slaves and the institution of slavery. Indeed the first thematic chapter is entitled “Diversity” and makes clear that initially in North America and right the way through to the end of slavery in Brazil and Cuba slaves were employed in virtually every economic activity, whether urban or rural, skilled or unskilled, and that therefore the classic tobacco/cotton/sugar/coffee plantation model of slavery is at best misleading. Moreover, slaves in Spanish and Portuguese America possessed routes to freedom through self-purchase (which the author tends to underestimate in the Brazilian case), which were denied to most North American and Caribbean slaves, where legal structures and plantation practice became more repressive with the passage of time.

A chapter on the demography of slavery highlights other differences. Whereas the free or freed coloured population of the United States and the British and French Caribbean remained extremely small, it was – thanks to more frequent manumission – much larger in Cuba and especially large in Brazil. Whereas only 1.5 per cent of the American population

were free blacks or mulattos in 1872, for example, the equivalent figure in Brazil was 43 per cent. Moreover, of the 58 per cent of Brazilians who were people of colour in this year, no fewer than 74 per cent were free. To be black or mulatto in Brazil, therefore, was not necessarily to be a slave, a quite striking contrast with the situation in North America. A further dramatic difference in the demography of slave populations was to be found in the fact that the importation of Africans to the USA came to halt after 1808 (unlike the continued massive imports into Brazil and Cuba) and that the growth of the slave population thereafter was a consequence of natural reproduction amongst the slaves. This was unique amongst large-scale slave systems in the Americas, though Bergad does acknowledge that slaves in some specific areas of other societies, such as Minas Gerais in Brazil in the nineteenth century, also managed to reproduce their populations naturally.

Here the author demonstrates an awareness of diversity within as well as between nations, an awareness which is reproduced in his chapter on the economics of slavery, which again stresses the multiplicity of slave occupations and the role of skilled slaves in the urban economy, especially in Brazil and Cuba. Some of these slaves were hired out by their masters, whilst others (*ganhadores*) even negotiated in the labour market on their own behalf and paid a fixed sum to their owners. Amongst these *ganhadores* were numbered many African women, who dominated the retail trade. Such slave workers, like their rural counterparts who cultivated small plots of land to produce goods for sale as well as their own consumption, were sometimes able to accumulate the resources to buy their freedom, a practice almost unknown and actually outlawed in many US states. Bergad's assessment of the slave economy also makes clear that it in no way discouraged economic modernization or technological modernization – contrary to older myths – and that it remained extremely prosperous and profitable until its end. (This theme is later picked up in a final chapter on abolition, which, as with most recent work, discredits the economic explanation of slavery's end and stresses humanitarian and religious motivations.)

Three other chapters (“In their own words”, “Making Space”, and “Resistance and Rebellion”) look at the slaves' responses to their situation. Whilst avoiding a romanticism about slave strategies of survival and resistance, Bergad nonetheless rightly stresses their creativity and the extent to which slave systems could only survive through negotiation and incentives, as well as the more obvious and often very brutal repression. Some slaves sought to accumulate sufficient capital to buy their freedom. This strategy, however, was normally not open to African males, who as a result formed the backbone of communities of runaway slaves (“maroon societies”) or engaged in armed rebellion. Amongst male slaves skilled creoles (slaves born in the Americas) dominated the ranks of the manumitted but were outnumbered by females. Interestingly, significant numbers of African females were also manumitted, possibly because their role in commerce enabled them to accumulate capital to purchase freedom.

Repertoires of resistance were both collective and individual, from “everyday resistance” (non-compliance with individual tasks, cheekiness, individual flight) to more collective forms of boycott and strike. Armed rebellion, often linked to maroon societies, also became increasingly common in Brazil between 1807 and 1835 and was often inspired and led by Muslim slaves. Bergad provides lively discussion of these issues of resistance, remaining aware that some maroon societies themselves took slaves, that slaves were often divided by ethnicity and that slave conspiracies were often betrayed by other slaves. Tensions between Africans and creoles were also a constant theme in the history of slavery. Differences in patterns of resistance are again clearly indicated (the relative absence of revolt in the USA, the centrality of Africans in Brazil) and in most respects Bergad again successfully compares a mass of information from the three societies.

The only area of this impressive comparative work, which seems to this reader to be relatively unexplored is that of gender and in particular that of female resistance. There has been a great deal of work recently on the recourse of slave women to the courts of

Brazil, Cuba, and even the USA in so-called “freedom suits”, whilst forms of “gynaecological resistance” (infanticide, abortion) have also been noted. Yet this makes no appearance in this otherwise excellent study.

Dick Geary

GURNEY, JOHN. *Brave Community: The Digger Movement in the English Revolution*. [Politics, Culture and Society in Early Modern Britain.] Manchester University Press, Manchester [etc.] 2007. xiii, 236 pp. £55.00; \$84.95; doi:10.1017/S0020859010000088

Ever since Eduard Bernstein wrote his pioneering study of the radical thought of the English Civil War and its aftermath, the figure of Gerrard Winstanley (1609–1676) has loomed large in any treatment of that radical thought. To Bernstein, Winstanley’s magnum opus *The Law of Freedom* was a “communistic utopia” and consequently, as a precursor of communism, Winstanley became a subject of interest to many other scholars with left-wing sympathies. Winstanley’s substantial body of writings, largely preserved among the many contemporary tracts collected by the mid-seventeenth-century London bookseller George Thomason, have naturally led to a great emphasis on Winstanley and his works. Those works have been collected in authoritative scholarly editions, and perhaps more articles and books have been published on him and his thought than on any other radical thinker of that time.¹

Consequently the figure of Winstanley and his literary legacy has largely overshadowed, if not obscured, the fact that he was part of the particular movement of the Diggers. He was its most outspoken and most prominent member, but hitherto very little was known about his associates. In his recent book, *Brave Community*, John Gurney has focused therefore on the Diggers as a group, and on the setting in which they primarily operated – the parishes of Cobham and Walton-on-Thames. Without Winstanley there would have been no Digger movement, as Gurney writes, and his study also sets out to reassess Winstanley’s career and intellectual development. In this book too then, Winstanley is assigned the leading role, but this time the limelight regularly shifts to the other, lesser-known actors in the piece – heroes and villains alike.

In order to establish a clearer picture of who the Diggers and their adversaries were exactly Gurney has undertaken a thorough, and undoubtedly lengthy, study of the primary sources for this particular part of Surrey, and painstakingly reconstructed the local circumstances at the end of the 1640s and who actually lived there at that time. This must have been very time-consuming – indeed Gurney’s first article on this subject dates from 1994 – though Gurney modestly refrains from alluding to what must have been an

1. Leaving literary figures, such as Milton, aside of course. Seminal studies on Winstanley include: the first full-length study of Winstanley by David W. Petegorsky, *Left-Wing Democracy in the English Civil War: A Study of the Social Philosophy of Gerrard Winstanley* (London, 1940); the study of Winstanley’s use of language by T. Wilson Hayes, *Winstanley the Digger: A Literary Analysis of Radical Ideas in the English Revolution* (Cambridge MA, 1979); and the study of his political thought by George Shulman, *Radicalism and Reverence: the Political Thought of Gerrard Winstanley* (Berkeley, CA, 1989). Winstanley’s writings were collected in authoritative editions: George H. Sabine (ed.), *The Works of Gerrard Winstanley* (Ithaca NY, 1941), and Christopher Hill (ed.), *The Law of Freedom, and Other Writings* (Harmondsworth, 1973).