University of Wisconsin–Madison  
Department of History

History 730  
Pro-Seminar in Latin American History  
CAPITALISM AND SLAVERY IN THE CARIBBEAN  
Semester I, 2014-15

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Office hours:  
Thursdays 12:00-1:00 (walk-in)  
Thursdays 1:00-3:00 (sign-up only)

Course description:  
This seminar will explore crucial debates on the history of Caribbean working peoples from the sixteenth to the nineteenth centuries. One of Europe’s foremost tropical frontiers in the age of merchant capitalism, the Caribbean islands and the contiguous lowlands of South and Central America were, along with Brazil, a locus of plantation systems created to satisfy the demand for tropical staples such as sugar, tobacco, cotton, and coffee. Because the area’s native population was practically annihilated during its initial contact with the Europeans, the establishment of efficient and profitable exploitation colonies in these relatively empty spaces hinged on the adoption of labor systems that subjected large numbers of forced migrants to working and living conditions so rigorous as to be universally abhorred by their victims. After some experimentation before 1650, African chattel slavery became the preferred mode of exploitation. The workers, brought from Africa in numbers that exceeded 4 million—for the Caribbean alone—between 1500 and 1865, were stripped of the individual rights which in Europe at the time were being increasingly regarded as “universal”. African slavery laid the material and demographic foundations for those “entirely new societies”, fashioned by the European colonizers as if they were the antitheses--albeit indispensable ones--of the emerging capitalist-liberal order.

Historians of the Caribbean have focused much of their attention on understanding the dynamics of labor systems through five centuries of colonial history. Several of the larger questions that continue to be debated in the literature will be examined here: How were specific forms of labor in the colonial sphere, and social relations in general, shaped by demands arising from European capitalism? In what ways, and to what extent, did capital accumulation in the South Atlantic system influence the rise of European factory capitalism? How did definitions of slavery and freedom condition understandings about the human condition more generally? More specific issues include: What were the determining factors in the selection of a specific “bundle of rights” over others’ labor? How is the transition from one system to another (e.g., indentured servitude to African slavery) explained? What concessions did the dominant groups tender to the subject groups, and how did such compromises affect social and cultural evolution? How and to what extent did the autonomous spaces shaped by slaves and other laborers make their mark on Creole cultures? Why was slavery abolished all of a sudden in the nineteenth century, and how was this event related to the triumph of industrial capital in the European core? Questions like these will form the backbone of seminar discussions.

Requirements

A) Paper: Seminar members will write a substantive, article-length (25-35 pp. long) paper on a pertinent topic, selected in consultation with the instructor. The paper should probe a particular question regarding Caribbean labor systems and their ancillary consequences during the period of slavery and emancipation. The paper should be comparative; that is, it should focus on more than one island, country or colony. Ideally, it should also straddle linguistic/political areas; for instance, it might compare Jamaica
with Cuba or the French West Indies with the Spanish islands. Finally, it should be more issue-oriented than citation-oriented. While the writer should strive for thoroughness in the bibliographic coverage, she/he should accord priority to the substantive, analytical issues encompassed by the topic. It should not be a historiographical paper or a “review of the literature.”

The papers are due on Friday, December 5, at 4 P.M. as PDF files via email to all seminar members. Members will present their papers during the last class session in a conference panel format; a schedule of presentations will be drawn early in the semester.

B) Class discussion sessions: In addition to making a presentation to the class on her/his research at the end of the semester, every seminar participant will lead two class sessions. For each one, she/he will prepare a written, two-page (maximum) précis of the most significant issues raised in the weekly readings, with the intention of laying the groundwork for the ensuing discussion. Each member is responsible for reading and printing the day’s summary, to be posted in advance on Learn@UW (no later than Tuesday at noon). A schedule of presentations will be drawn up at the first seminar meeting.

Books suggested for purchase

We will read the following books in their entirety. Other required readings are on Learn@UW.


SCHEDULE AND READINGS

Week I (Sept. 4) -- General Orientation
No assigned readings. Some general works on Caribbean history that seminar members may read for background include: Franklin W. Knight, *The Caribbean: The Genesis of a Fragmented Nationalism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1978), Eric Williams, *From Columbus to Castro, the History of the Caribbean, 1492-1969* (New York: Vintage, 1970), and Stephan Palmié and Francisco A. Scarano, eds., *The Caribbean: A History of the Region and its People* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011) are among the most recommendable. Colin Palmer and Franklin W. Knight, eds., *The Modern Caribbean* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1989), may also be useful, though its chapters focus primarily on the modern period. For incisive articles on Caribbean history written with synthesis in mind, check out the UNESCO History of the Caribbean (several volumes to date, 1997-2003). You may also want to examine one or more of the following:


Week II (Sept. 11) -- Caribbean Workers and the Empire of Sweetness


Week III (Sept. 18) -- Problems in the Early Adoption of Racial Slavery


**Week IV (Sept. 25) -- From Indentured Servitude to Slavery in the English Caribbean**

Eric Williams, *Capitalism and Slavery*, ch. 1.


**Week V (Oct. 2) -- Life, Death, Slavery**


**Week VI (Oct. 9) -- Slavery, War, and Revolution: From Saint-Domingue to Haiti**


**Week VII (Oct. 16) -- Plantation Slavery and Capitalist Development: The Williams Thesis**

Williams, *Capitalism and Slavery*, complete the book.


Week VIII (Oct. 23) -- Slavery and Freedom: A Philosophical Legacy


Week IX (Oct. 30) -- Counter-plantation Legacies


Week X (Nov. 6) -- Peasant (and Proletarian?) Adaptations during Slavery and through Emancipation

María Elena Díaz, The Virgin, the King, and the Royal Slaves of El Cobre, 1670–1780, entire book.


Week XI (Nov. 13) -- The Demon Within: Slave Society in Nineteenth-Century Cuba

Christopher Schmidt-Nowara, Empire and Antislavery: Spain, Cuba, and Puerto Rico, 1833-1874 (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1999).


Week XII (Nov. 20) Emancipation and the Struggle for Meaningful Freedom


**Week XIII (Dec. 4) -- Contract Labor, Migration and Social Segmentation**


Selections from Verene A. Shepherd, *Maharani’s Misery: Narratives of a Passage from India to the Caribbean* (Mona, Jamaica: University of the West Indies Press, 2002).

**Weeks XIV (Longer session on Dec. 11) Research Panels**
I. Capitalism, Slavery, and Emancipation: History and Historiography


Goveia, Elsa V. “Eric Williams, British Historians and the West Indies.” Caribbean Quarterly 10 (June 1964): 48-54.


II. The Origins of Racial Slavery


III. The Political Economy of Caribbean Sugar


Scarano, Francisco A. “Estructuras de la plantación azucarera esclavista: el modelo clásico y sus variaciones.” *Del Caribe* VI, no. 16-17 (1990): 6-14.


IV. The Slave Trade


V. The Haitian Revolution and the Caribbean


VI. Plantation Slavery and Capitalist Development


VII. The Williams Debate


VIII. Slave Resistance and Adaptation


Franco, José Luciano. La conspiración de Aponte. La Habana: Archivo Nacional, 1963.


IX. Proto-peasantries


X. Cuban Slavery and Emancipation


Saco y López Cisneros, José Antonio. *Historia de la esclavitud de la raza africana en el Nuevo Mundo y en especial en los países americó-hispanos*. With a foreword by Fernando Ortiz. La Habana: Cultural, 1938.


XI. Emancipation in the Broader Caribbean


*Apuntes sobre la cuestión de la reforma política y de la introducción de Africanos en las islas de Cuba y Puerto-Rico*. Madrid: Fortanet, 1866.


XII. Contract and Coolie Laborers


