

UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN-MADISON
Department of History
Semester I, 2011-12

Interdepartmental 982

Tuesday 9-11 a.m.
5255 Humanities

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Office hours:
Tue. 2:30-2:30 (Sign-up only)
Mon. 3:30-5:30 (Walk-in hours)

CARIBBEAN PEASANTS IN COMPARATIVE HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

When one thinks of world peasants, the Caribbean is hardly the first that comes to mind. In fact, if most students of peasantries were asked to locate and describe the world's chief "peasant zones", the Caribbean would probably not be among the top ten on any of the lists. Long defined by European and North American imperial powers as an area notably suitable for large-scale export agriculture, organized largely on the basis of imported working populations, the islands of the West Indies and the surrounding tropical lowlands are among the foremost *agro-industrial* areas spawned by European expansion. As Sidney Mintz reminds us, the manufacture of sugar from the juice of the cane was among the most sophisticated mechanical and chemical processes invented before the era of steam. Because sugar so thoroughly dominated Caribbean history until the middle of the twentieth century, and because the laboring populations recruited for sugar-making were chiefly slaves brought from Africa, it would appear that there was little room left in Caribbean history for the development of peasantries.

Yet, in actuality, few world areas have appeared as suitable for the study of processes leading *into* and *out of* "peasantness" as the West Indies. Several of the most useful and popular concepts for the study of these transitions have been derived from observations of Caribbean societies: Wolf's classification of "closed corporate" and "open" peasant communities, for example, and Mintz's construct of the "rural proletariat" as an identifiable social type quite distinct from peasants and urban workers. Moreover, in few cases where the "nation" is defined by the presence of a large class of rural smallholders have the complex, interdependent forces of race, class, gender, and external control been so palpably central to the historical process as in Haiti since its independence in 1804. Finally, Caribbean migration to the United States and Europe has recently introduced into these regions populations whose customs, mentalities, and cultural orientations are definitely no less rural than those of the Eastern European or Italian migrants of an earlier time.

What does it mean to be a peasant in the Caribbean setting today, and what has it meant over the long stretch of more than five centuries? What commonalities have existed between such peasantries and those of Asia, Africa, Europe, and Latin America? How have they arisen, and how can one characterize their relations with dominant forms of production, such as the plantation, and with the various kinds of states that have arisen historically across the region? If peasants, by their putative temperament, resist outside domination and control, what forms has this resistance taken in the Caribbean and why?

These are some of the questions that will concern us in this seminar. In order to tackle the problems they raise, we will look at some of the conceptual foundations of peasant studies and will sample the ways in which peasantries have been looked at by analysts. We will also read selectively from the historical, anthropological, and sociological literature on Caribbean peasantries. The intent, however, is not to cover any one problem in depth but to survey the breadth of issues which peasantries and "peasantness" pose, especially in the Caribbean context. Seminar work will concentrate instead on

research leading to a substantial paper, which each student will present to the seminar in one of the latter sessions of the semester.

Requirements

A) *Paper*: Seminar members will write a substantive, article-length (20-25 pp. long) paper on a topic she/he will select in consultation with the instructor. The paper should examine a problem in the history or contemporary situation of one or more Caribbean peasant formations. It may focus on only one Caribbean society if it lies within the insular Caribbean. It may also bring in a comparative Latin American case into dialogue with the Caribbean literature and/or its theoretical or conceptual explorations.

The semester paper is intended to be a “research piece;” that is, it should be substantially steeped in primary sources. While the writer should strive for thoroughness in the bibliographic coverage, she/he should accord priority to the substantive, analytical issues raised by the question or questions posed from the beginning as a guide to the investigation. It should definitely not be a historiographic paper or a “review of the literature.”

Papers are due on Friday, December 2, at 4 P.M. via email to Professor Scarano, who will convert them into PDFs (if not already in that format) and post them on Mywebspace for reading online or printing. All papers will be the subject of a short discussion during the last two class sessions (November 29 and December 6 and 13), which we will hold outside of the Humanities building at a place TBA. A schedule of presentations will be drawn early in the semester so that seminar members will know when it will be their turn to explain and discussed their findings.

B) *Presentations of weekly readings*: In addition to the paper presentation at the end of the semester, each seminar participant will make at least one, and perhaps two, brief presentation(s) that give(s) a critical overview of (a) particular week(s)’s readings. When it is your turn for this presentation, you will bring a two-page (maximum) written summary of the main points you wish to raise in dialogue with the readings; please bring copies for all seminar members, as we will spend the first few minutes of each section familiarizing ourselves with the tenor of your presentation. A schedule of presentations will be drawn up at the first seminar meeting.

The presentations will provide a synthesis and critique of the weekly readings. They should not only concentrate on the reading(s)’ contents, but also inform the seminar about the historiographical or disciplinary context within which the author(s)’ are writing. In so doing, they will lay the groundwork for the ensuing discussions during the seminar period. It is expected that the presenter will assume a leading role in seminar deliberations on the day of her/his presentation.

Books to be read in their entirety

Sidney W. Mintz, *Three Ancient Colonies: Caribbean Themes and Variations* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2010).

Eric R. Wolf, *Peasants* (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1966) <on College Library reserve>.

Richard Turits, *Foundations of Despotism: Peasants, the Trujillo Regime, and Modernity in Dominican History* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003).

María Elena Díaz, *The Virgin, the King, and the Royal Slaves of El Cobre, 1670–1780: Negotiating Freedom in Colonial Cuba, 1670–1780* (Stanford: Stanford UP, 2000).

Jean Besson, *Martha Brae’s Two Histories: European Expansion and Caribbean Culture-Building in Jamaica* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2001).

Luis A. Figueroa, *Sugar, Slavery, and Freedom in Nineteenth-Century Puerto Rico* (San Juan; Chapel Hill: University of Puerto Rico Press; University of North Carolina Press, 2005).

Mimi Sheller, *Democracy after Slavery: Black Publics and Peasant Radicalism in Haiti and Jamaica* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2001).

Peggy Levitt, *The Transnational Villagers* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: Univ. of California Press, 2001).

SCHEDULE AND READINGS

(* = digitally available, most through course page on Mywebspace)

Week 1 (Sept. 6) -- Peasant Studies and Caribbean studies (orientation session)

No assigned readings. If you feel that you do not have an adequate background in Caribbean history, you may wish to read a general history or work of synthesis. Stephan Palmié and Francisco A. Scarano, eds., *The Caribbean: A History of the Region and its Peoples* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011), B. W. Higman, *A Concise History of the Caribbean* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), Franklin W. Knight's *The Caribbean: The Genesis of a Fragmented Nationalism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1978) and Eric William's *From Columbus to Castro, the History of the Caribbean, 1492-1969* (New York: Vintage, 1970) are among the most recommendable (and skimmable). Colin Palmer and Franklin W. Knight, *The Modern Caribbean* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1989) may also be useful, although its contents are predominantly focused on the contemporary era. You may also wish to examine one or several of the following: Sidney W. Mintz, "The Caribbean as a Socio-Cultural Area," in M. Horowitz, ed., *Peoples and Cultures of the Caribbean* (Garden City, N.Y., 1971), 17-46; Jean Benoist, "La organización social de las Antillas," in M. Moreno Fragnals, ed., *Africa en América Latina* (1978), 77-102; and several of the essays in Sidney W. Mintz and Sally Price, eds., *Caribbean Contours* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1985).

Week 2 (Sept. 13) -- The Caribbean as a Problem in Atlantic History

Reading:

Sidney W. Mintz, *Three Ancient Colonies: Caribbean Themes and Variations* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2010).

Week 3 (Sept. 20) -- Peasantries in the Scholarly Imagination

Readings:

Eric R. Wolf, *Peasants* (Englewood Cliffs, 1966).

Michel Rolph Trouillot, *Peasants and Capital: Dominica in the World Economy* (Baltimore, 1988), ch. 1 ("Peasants as Part-Economies")

Week 4 (Sept. 27) Peasant Reconstitutions: An Introduction

Readings:

*Sidney W. Mintz, "Slavery and the Rise of Peasantries," *Historical Reflections* 6 (1979):213-42.

- *Silvio R. Duncan Baretta and John Markoff. "Civilization and Barbarism: Cattle Frontiers in Latin America," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 20 (Oct. 1978): 587-620.
- *Francisco Pérez de la Riva, "Cuban Palenques," in Richard Price, ed., *Maroon Societies: Rebel Slave Communities in the Americas* (Garden City, N.Y., 1973), 49-59. <Available through Google books.>
- *Harry Hoetink, *The Dominican People: Notes for a Historical Sociology* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1982), ch. 1, pp. 1-18.

Week 5 (Oct. 4) Caribbean Hinterlands of Atlantic Capitalism: The Spanish Islands

Readings:

- Richard Turits, *Foundations of Despotism: Peasants, the Trujillo Regime, and Modernity in Dominican History* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003), chs. 1-2.
- *Cassá, Roberto. "El campesinado dominicano", *Boletín del Archivo General de la Nación* XXX.112 (mayo-agosto de 2005): 213–61.
- *González de la Peña, Raymundo Manuel. "La figura social del montero en la formación histórica del campesinado dominicano", *Clío, Órgano de la Academia Dominicana de la Historia* 74.168 (julio-diciembre de 2004): 75–96.
- *Giusti-Cordero, Juan. "Beyond Sugar Revolutions: Rethinking the Spanish Caribbean in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries," *Empirical Futures: Anthropologists and Historians Engage the Work of Sidney W. Mintz*, eds. George Baca, Aisha Khan, and Stephan Palmié (Chapel Hill: Univ. of North Carolina Press, 2009), 58–83.
- *Scarano, Francisco A. "The *Jíbaro* Masquerade and the Subaltern Politics of Creole Identity Formation in Puerto Rico, 1745–1823," *American Historical Review* 101.5 (Dec 1996): 1398–431.

Week 6 (Oct. 11) Peasant/Slaves in a Colonial Mining Frontier: Cuba's *El Cobre*

Reading:

María Elena Díaz, *The Virgin, the King, and the Royal Slaves of El Cobre, 1670–1780: Negotiating Freedom in Colonial Cuba, 1670–1780* (Stanford: Stanford UP, 2000).

Week 7 (Oct. 18) Proto-peasantries in Slave Plantation Societies

Reading:

Jean Besson, *Martha Brae's Two Histories: European Expansion and Caribbean Culture-Building in Jamaica* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2001).

Week 8 (Oct. 25) Forced Labor, "Peonization," and the Struggle Against Peasant Independence

Readings:

Luis A. Figueroa, *Sugar, Slavery, and Freedom in Nineteenth-Century Puerto Rico* (San Juan; Chapel Hill: University of Puerto Rico Press; University of North Carolina Press, 2005).

*O. Nigel Bolland, "The Politics of Freedom in the British Caribbean," in Frank McGlynn and Seymour Drescher, eds., *The Meaning of Freedom: Economics, Politics, and Culture after Slavery* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1992), 113-146.

Week 9 (Nov. 1) SEMINAR RECESS

Week 10 (Nov. 8) Peasants in Rebellions and Revolutions

Readings:

Mimi Sheller, *Democracy after Slavery: Black Publics and Peasant Radicalism in Haiti and Jamaica* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2001).

Eric Wolf, "Cuba," in *Peasant Wars of the Twentieth Century* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1999), 251-275. Other eds. available.

Week 11 (Nov. 15) Populism and "its" Peasantry: A View from the Dominican Republic

Reading:

Turits, *Foundations of Despotism*, chs. 3-end.

Week 12 (Nov. 22) Migration and the Transnationalized Peasantry

Reading:

Peggy Levitt, *The Transnational Villagers* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: U of California P, 2001).

Weeks 13-15 (Nov. 29, Dec 6 & 13)

Research presentations (place TBA).

SELECT BIBLIOGRAPHY

The following is a sample of recent writings in general peasant studies and on the peasantry in the Caribbean and Latin America. It reflects the instructor's reading of the literature and does not purport to be comprehensive.

Peasants and Peasant Societies.

General and Comparative

Adas, Michael. "From Avoidance to Confrontation: Peasant Protest in Precolonial and Colonial Southeast Asia." *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 23 (Apr. 1981): 217-47.

_____. "From Footdragging to Flight: The Evasive History of Peasant Avoidance Protest in South and Southeast Asia." *Journal of Peasant Studies* 13 (Jan. 1986): 64-86.

Alapuro, Risto. "Peasants, States, and the Capitalist World System." *Acta Sociologica* 20, no. 2 (1977): 181-93.

Alexander, Jennifer, and Paul Alexander. "Protecting Peasants from Capitalism: The Subordination of Javanese Traders by the Colonial State." *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 33 (April 1991): 370-94.

Andersson, Christian. *Peasant or Proletarian? : Wage Labour and Peasant Economy During Industrialization : The Algerian Experience*. Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell International, 1985.

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Blok, Anton. "The Peasant and the Brigand: Social Banditry Reconsidered." *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 14 (Sept. 1972): 494-503.

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