MACMILLAN
ENCYCLOPEDIA
OF
WORLD
SLAVERY
at the time of ploughing, planting, and harvest. True latifundia were probably developed mainly in marginal land more suited to pasturage and would have had few slaves.

This model of mixed rural labor forces suits better what we know about agriculture during the later Roman Empire. That era saw the persistence of large estates, many of which eventually came into the hands of the church. Rural slavery persisted, but the lack of massive fresh supplies of war captives meant that slaves performed only limited, specialized roles. The major change was the increased legal bondage of the peasantry to the great estate owners. Some historians have seen predecessors of the serfs of medieval times in these bound peasants, or coloni, of the late Roman Empire. Given the disruptive arrival of new Germanic groups with their own social institutions in the early Middle Ages, such strong continuities are unlikely.

See also ANCIENT ROME; ECONOMICS OF SLAVERY.

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Stephen L. Dyson

United States

The term plantation has many connotations. In its most literal sense, it refers to the action of placing plants in the soil; therefore any agricultural unit or stand of planted trees can be a plantation. The term can also refer to a settlement of people in a new or conquered locale. Thus, the English referred to their Ulster plantation in Ireland and their Virginia plantation in America. Another common meaning, as in “to send to the plantations,” implied penal service in a colony. Finally, “plantations” refer to estates, often in tropical locales, on which sugar, tobacco, cotton, coffee, or rice are grown, chiefly by means of servile labor. This last sense, while incorporating some of the other meanings, is most relevant to this article.

Plantations as estates normally shared a number of features. First, they were agricultural units. Second, they generally operated on a fairly large scale, although the scale varied over time, across space, and by crop; size was typically evident in acreage, capital equipment, and workforce. In the mid-nineteenth-century United States, a plantation was defined as a unit operating with twenty or more slaves, whereas in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries many plantations had used far fewer slaves. Third, plantations commonly supplied a distant market with a specialized product; although many plantations devoted some acreage to subsistence crops, they were primarily export oriented. Fourth, labor was intensive, generally low-skilled, engaged in routine tasks, and largely coerced—force being a major feature of plantations. Fifth, labor was often imported, although in some cases the labor force became self-reproducing.

As early as the seventh century, plantations with at least some of these five characteristics existed in the eastern Mediterranean, especially in the Levant. Europe came into contact with these plantations at the time of the Crusades. The Crusaders inaugurated a westward movement of sugar plantations, first to Cyprus; then to Sicily, southern Iberia, and parts of North Africa; and finally to various Atlantic islands such as the Madeiras and Canaries. These last were the crucial stepping-stones to carry the plantation regime from the Mediterranean to the Americas. The Spanish first established plantations in Hispaniola, and later in Jamaica, Puerto Rico, and coastal Mexico. The Portuguese, with their domination of the African coast and thus access to a ready supply of forced labor, had far greater success in establishing plantations in Brazil. By the time the British settlement of North America began, plantations had a long history in both the Old and the New World.

The first North American plantations were in the Chesapeake region. The introduction of a commercially successful variety of tobacco from the West Indies in the 1610s proved the saving of Virginia. A booming export sector, fueled by initially spectacular prices for tobacco, lured large numbers of immigrants to the colony. From the mid-1610s to the 1680s, the Chesapeake tobacco economy experienced a period of general growth. Although the initial boom lasted less than a decade, planters were able to earn adequate profits despite falling tobacco prices by lowering their costs and improving their productivity. Most tobacco was raised on owner-operated units by small planters with the help of family members and occasional indentured servants, largely poor immigrants who signed contracts or indentures in England agreeing to work a specified number of years in the Chesapeake in return for free passage. Consequently, this period has been dubbed the age of the small planter. From a population of just under 1,000 in 1620, the population of Virginia and Maryland had increased to 60,000 by 1680. This population was primarily white
and comprised many servants; the black population numbered only about 4,000.

Chesapeake plantations underwent major changes in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries. The most important transformation was that tidewater tobacco planters began to substitute African slaves for white servants. As the supply of servants dwindled, largely because of improved conditions in England, and the supply of slaves rose, because ships direct from Africa began visiting the Chesapeake, those planters with sufficient capital switched to black labor. The transformation in the labor force occurred at a time of slow growth, even stagnation, in the Chesapeake tobacco economy. Rising costs and a failure to capture substantial gains in productivity account for the slump, which lasted from about 1680 to 1715. Prosperous families weathered the long depression better than poorer whites and could more readily afford the high price of slaves. A gentry class and large-scale agricultural units began to emerge; the era of the small planter ended. The white population was now growing by natural increase and imports of African slaves were on the rise; thus, by 1710 the Chesapeake population stood at 124,000, of whom 22,000 were now black.

From 1715 to the American Revolution, the Chesapeake economy experienced another sustained period of growth. Growth, however, was now slower than during the seventeenth century. Tobacco output per laborer declined and growth was demand-led rather than supply-driven. Yeoman planters still grew tobacco, but increasingly tenant farms and modest plantations worked by slaves dominated production. Tobacco cultivation expanded from the tidewater into the piedmont. The typical plantation was about two hundred acres, and the typical slaveholder owned three or four

Slaves from the early Chesapeake plantations prepare a shipment of tobacco to be sent back to England. [Library of Congress/Corbis]
adult slaves. Even the greatest planters who owned thousands of acres and hundreds of slaves divided their operations into numerous quarters where the workforce rarely exceeded a dozen or so slaves. About half of all householders owned no slaves, and about half owned no land.

Diversification was a marked feature of the Chesapeake's eighteenth-century economic development. Wheat became an important second crop in many older tidewater counties, and in the backcountry an economy of small farms and mixed grain-livestock husbandry emerged. The Chesapeake economy was increasingly notable for a larger range of crops, a wider diffusion of craft skills, more orchards, more dairying, and more textile production. Slaves served more often as farm workers than as plantation hands. Population surged, as now the black population joined the white in becoming self-sustaining. By 1720, the black population began to grow faster from natural increase than through slave imports. The less strenuous labor demands of tobacco than were required by many other staples, and the ready supply of corn due to the diversified Chesapeake economy, help explain why this region's slave population was the first in the New World to reproduce itself. By 1780 the Chesapeake population numbered 786,000, of whom 304,000 were black.

The Revolutionary era set in train developments that would characterize the Chesapeake plantation economy down to the Civil War. First, European demand for tobacco failed to keep pace with production. Tobacco cultivation became increasingly tenuous in much of the Chesapeake tidewater, in part because of extensive deterioration of the soil; by 1800 the crop was grown largely in southern Maryland and the southern Virginia piedmont. Because of their reduced labor requirements, tidewater slaveholders often hired out their slaves. Second, in part because of evangelical religion, revolutionary ideology, and the decline of tobacco, some tidewater planters began manumitting their slaves. The Chesapeake region began to fragment as blacks acquired more independence, opportunity, and nominal freedom in Maryland than in Virginia. By 1860 Maryland was only a semislave state where, in some places, a majority of blacks were free; in contrast, just one in ten blacks was free in Virginia. Third, the American Revolution freed whites to evict Indians from lands west of the Allegheny Mountains, and tobacco cultivation moved west with settlers to Kentucky, Tennessee, and Missouri. The Chesapeake region became the primary seedbed of the Southwest interior, as thousands of Chesapeake whites and their slaves migrated into Kentucky and further south. By the middle of the nineteenth century, about 16,000 tobacco plantations existed in the United States; and more tobacco production occurred west of the Appalachians than east. In Kentucky and Missouri an additional 8,000 plantations grew hemp, which was used principally for cordage and bale cloth, required by upland cotton planters. In 1850 an estimated 350,000 slaves grew tobacco and another 60,000 grew hemp; the average tobacco plantation and hemp plantation therefore numbered 22 and 7 slaves respectively.

The second plantation region to emerge in North America was the lowcountry of South Carolina, and later the Cape Fear district of North Carolina, Georgia, and northern Florida. In part an outgrowth of the Caribbean plantation system—because many white Barbadians migrated to early South Carolina with their slaves—the lowcountry established itself as a plantation region when, in the 1690s, it began the successful commercial cultivation of rice. At first, cattle-ranching and naval stores occupied most slaves. But once rice became the mainstay, output grew rapidly, particularly when planters learned to increase yields and control weeds by flooding fields with dammed water from nearby swamps. Perhaps African slaves, some of whom knew how to grow rice in their homelands, helped teach white South Carolinians some of the techniques of rice growing, although many African cultivation methods differed significantly from those employed in the lowcountry. What is indubitable is that by the first decade of the eighteenth century, South Carolina, after experiencing considerable use of free, indentured, and Indian slave labor, became the only North American colony with a black majority. In 1710 just over half of South Carolina's 10,000 people were black, and the black population of the Lower South continued to grow extremely rapidly until 1740, when it numbered 50,000, at the time the white population was about 25,000.

The 1740s—when war between Spain and England disrupted shipping, rice prices dropped, and slave imports temporarily halted, in part because of heightened fears of slave revolt generated by the Stono rebellion of 1739—was a period of stagnation in the Lower South's economy. Since the slump was more short-lived than that experienced earlier in the Chesapeake, and since large planters were already firmly in control, no great shakeout ensued. Some planters experimented with import substitution, greater self-sufficiency, and diversification, but the primary experiment was the development of a second staple, indigo, particularly valuable because it required less shipping than rice. At a time when Chesapeake planters were turning to grains, which in turn reduced labor demands, lowcountry planters were adding another labor- and capital-intensive staple to their agricultural repertoire. In addition, lowcountry planters
at mid-century began experimenting with the tidal flooding of fields on coastal plantations. Tidewater cultivation, which would become the dominant production method, increased labor demands during the winter months but also resulted in significant improvements in crop yields.

The middle of the eighteenth century to the American Revolution were years of exceptional prosperity for Lower South planters. Some specialized in tidewater cultivation along the coast; others on the sea islands and in the middle country had their slaves growing primarily indigo; and yet others grew rice in their inland swamps and indigo on the adjoining uplands. Rice culture spread from South Carolina northward into Cape Fear and southward into Georgia and later east Florida. By the Revolution, rice output per laborer was 40 percent higher than early eighteenth-century levels. Just before the Revolution the lowcountry slave population began to grow—but only slowly—through natural increase. The region still relied heavily on the Atlantic slave trade; the arduousness and unhealthiness of rice cultivation and restricted food supplies due to a highly specialized economy help account for this delay in developing a self-sustaining slave population. By 1780 a typical lowcountry district was 90 percent black, a majority of slaves lived on units of fifty or more slaves and on plantations of more than a thousand acres. In 1780 the Lower South population stood at over 500,000, of whom 208,000 were black.

The post-Revolutionary era saw considerable change in the Lower South plantation world. Soon after the Revolution, indigo lost importance as a commercial crop and was succeeded by a new staple, the blackseeded long-staple cotton, soon known as sea-island cotton. More difficult to produce and yielding less than its upland counterpart, but bringing substantially higher prices, sea-island cotton was a luxury product confined to the littoral of South Carolina, Georgia, and middle Florida. In addition, rice cultivation became more and more specialized, increasingly confined to the seventeen tidal rivers extending from the Cape Fear River in southeastern North Carolina to the Saint Johns River in northern Florida. In 1850 the U.S. census counted only 551 plantations growing rice. They were also the largest in North America, averaging 226 slaves.

The third plantation system in North America took a long time to take root. Founded at the very end of the seventeenth century, French Louisiana was never a true plantation colony, but rather a rough-and-tumble, violent world of military outposts, maroon camps, and interracial alliances that made it one of the most racially flexible societies in the Americas. A few plantations producing tobacco and indigo did exist, but exports were of minor significance. Under Spanish rule, the slave population grew sharply, primarily from slave imports—from about 5,000 in the mid-1760s to 24,000 in 1800—and plantations cultivating tobacco and indigo grew more numerous. Experiments in sugar cultivation occurred, but the permanent establishment of a sugar industry had to wait until the 1790s, when immigrants from Saint Domingue introduced improved varieties of sugarcane and techniques for crystallizing the juice.

Only from the 1820s onward did sugarcane become the principal crop in Louisiana, and only about half the state’s parishes—a southern tier with access to the rich alluvial lands of the Mississippi and its tributaries—contained sugar plantations. Some sugarcane was grown on lowcountry plantations, particularly of Florida, but most of the North American crop was produced in southern Louisiana. The work of a sugar plantation was exceptionally onerous, particularly during harvest; in Louisiana the labor demands also included ditch-digging, levee-building, and a fierce work pace because of the race against late-year frosts. Louisiana sugar plantations had a reputation as the worst work environment in the American South, although their slaves, unlike many in the Caribbean, did increase by natural means. From about 1820 to 1860 the number of Louisiana sugar estates increased sevenfold from about 200 to 1,400, and the slaves on those estates increased at about the same rate from about 20,000 to 130,000. By the middle of the nineteenth century, 2,681 sugar plantations existed in the United States, and an estimated 150,000 slaves cultivated the crop. The average sugar plantation therefore numbered 55 slaves, the second largest plantation type in the United States.

The last plantation system to arise in the United States was by far the largest. The cultivation of greenseeded short-staple cotton took off in earnest in the 1790s. It would eventually sprawl across a huge southern interior, a fertile crescent of rich land stretching from upcountry Carolina through Georgia and Alabama to the Mississippi Delta and Texas—an area of about 4000,000 square miles. Waves of development drew settlers to the region: the invention of an improved cotton gin in 1793 proved a catalyst for the opening of backcountry Georgia and South Carolina; major growth in Alabama and Mississippi occurred after the War of 1812; and rapid expansion on slavery’s last frontier took place after Texas became a republic and was admitted to the Union. During every decade between 1810 and 1860 more than 100,000 slave migrants moved into this vast region.

The initial boom was long-lived, but, as with all staples, it did not last. The search for productivity gains became insistent. One became available in the 1820s
after planters in the lower Mississippi Valley crossbred short-staple cotton with a Mexican strain. This new variety, known as Mexican or Petit Gulf cotton, tripled the amount of fiber that workers could harvest during a picking season. Falling cotton prices in the late 1830s and 1840s provided the impetus for other changes. Cotton planters turned heavily to mechanization: with the aid of a range of horse-drawn equipment, a slave became, on average, able to cultivate twenty acres in cotton and corn, as well as grains, vegetables, and fruits.

These and other changes made cotton king in the antebellum South. At the beginning of the nineteenth century, about one in ten United States slaves lived on cotton plantations; by 1860 two in three did. In the middle of the nineteenth century, an estimated 1,815,000 slaves worked in cotton on seventy-four thousand plantations. An average cotton plantation, therefore, numbered 24 slaves, making it somewhat larger than a typical tobacco plantation but much smaller than a sugar or rice plantation.

Four distinct, contrasting, and evolving plantation systems therefore inhabited the United States in 1860. The core was the cotton kingdom, but on the margins were tobacco (and hemp) in the upper South, rice (and sea-island cotton) in the lower southeast, and sugar in southern Louisiana. Different as these plantation regimes were, they had much in common. A considerable measure of coercion was one element, embodied in the ubiquitous whip, whether it was in the hands of a master, overseer, or driver—or all three. A high labor participation rate, with most men, women, children, and the elderly put to work, was another. A regimented and highly supervised form of labor, the gang system, was widely used, although task labor was common in the rice regime and became more widespread, along with other incentives, in all crop regimes over time. A greater intensity of labor per day, a speeding of the work process, also seems to have distinguished slave labor on plantations from free labor on farms. In all of these ways, the success of United States plantations was bought at the expense of the slaves who built them.

Although the plantation was an oppressive institution, it provided some compensations. Some large planters in particular developed a paternalistic conception of their role, and their boasts of the good treatment of their slaves, while often self-serving, sometimes had merit. Slaves on plantations were often better fed, housed, and clothed than their counterparts on farms. More important, slaves on plantations had greater opportunities to form families and participate in a community life than slaves on farms. Especially on large plantations, many slaves married within the estate, formed extensive kin ties, and developed strong feelings of solidarity. Plantations were key sites in the growth of robust slave families and distinctive cultural experiences among slaves.

The plantation system even survived emancipation, although much transformed. It lasted in modified form well into the twentieth century. Planters continued to own large amounts of land, to retain some control over production decisions, and to achieve scale economies from centralized management and marketing. The greatest transformation was the ending of slavery. Freedpeople gained a greater measure of control over their own lives: they refused to work in gangs, resisted efforts to subjugate them to the old plantation discipline, and moved onto family farms. But they were still entrapped by their plantation landlords.

See also LABOR SYSTEMS; STONO REBELLION; UNITED STATES.

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PLANTATIONS: Brazil

Brazilian plantations were large privately owned agricultural properties where—under unequal and involuntary labor conditions initially applied to captive Indians and then to African slaves—a commercial tropical crop was produced for sale in distant markets, often overseas. Immediate origins derive from the Atlantic islands, specifically Madeira at the end of the fifteenth century and São Tomé a century later. In the Atlantic islands Portuguese and foreign producers and merchants, mainly Italian, adapted and modified earlier Mediterranean and Iberian techniques of sugar production, estate management, and commercialization of sugar to meet local growing conditions. Labor was provided by enslaved Africans procured from trading forts that had been established at Axim and São Jorge da Mina on the West African coast. By the time of its transfer to Brazil in the sixteenth century, the fully formed sugar mill complex of the Atlantic islands had elements of a capitalist agricultural estate that drew on noncapitalist social relationships.

Slaves and Sugar Production

Portuguese and foreign merchants in the Atlantic islands trade supplied cane cuttings, cultivation tech-

iques, and African slaves to recipients of crown land grants in the Brazilian coastal donataries of São Vicente and Pernambuco, where the first fully developed plantation systems emerged after 1570, though at this time they were never actually referred to as “plantations.” The unit of production in the sugar industry was the engenho, named for the processing mill which came to represent the complex of land, coerced labor, technical skills, and capital that was the focus of social and economic organization. The engenho was mainly located along Brazil’s narrow coastal strip, near to sources of water, timber, and stone. Its layout varied in size and complexity, but it was largely self-contained. The great house, with nearby fruit groves and vegetable gardens for provisions, was the social hub of the estate; there the owner presided over his family, a small patriarchal community that included a chaplain, the foremen, retainers—who received the protection of the landlord and assistance in return for a variety of services—and male and female slave laborers. Domestic slaves lived in the great house; all other slaves were housed in separate senzalas, or slave quarters, near to sheds, stables, processing units for maize and manioc, and the animal-powered or, on large estates, the water-powered mill. Separate facilities existed on the grounds for foremen, administrators, retainers, and their families. Grazing areas and fields of cane extended outward to forested reserves that held supplies of wood for the mill and for brickmaking and tile manufactures.

Sugar production involved predominantly imported African slave labor after 1580; and although the size of the slave labor force varied with the size and complexity of the estate, an average engenho held between sixty and one hundred slaves. The scale of slaveholding is suggested by import estimates of 4,000 slaves per year between 1570 and 1640. In 1600 the total African slave population was 13,000 to 15,000, and it continued to expand as levels of imports increased to 7,000 to 8,000 per year, reaching 150,000 in 1680. The negligible rate of increase in Brazil’s slave population was due to a limited diet, crowded housing, disease, brutal working conditions, and harsh punishment, factors that for the average field slave on a sugar plantation meant survival for only seven years after arriving from Africa. A sexual imbalance that was aggravated by the preference of planters for male and adult African slaves in the regular transatlantic shipments, mistreatment, low birthrates, and high rates of infant mortality also kept reproduction rates negative. Although some planters rewarded productive and cooperative slaves with incentives that included portions of sugar, cane whisky, small payments, time off to farm garden plots for provision of food, and in limited cases, manumission, few considered improving living conditions.
Two slaves plant sugarcane under the supervision of a whip-wielding overseer. [Corbis-Bettmann]

for slaves, since the average slave on a sugar plantation would recover his or her cost in less than two years of labor. Continuous supervision and surveillance by armed retainers hindered slaves’ attempts to resist the brutality of the plantation labor regime. Suicides, revolts, escapes, and personal attacks on overseers and owners and their families, in addition to destruction of machinery, killing of draft animals, and burning of canefields, were some of the ways in which slaves, individually or collectively, opposed the institution of slavery.

Sugarcane was a unique commodity that required both agricultural skills and highly technical and costly refining to produce. The initial sugar crop took about a year and a half to mature, but successive crops every nine months kept the same field productive for three or four years without replanting. The sugar cycle was determined by the harvest, which in Bahia could run as long as three hundred days, from late July to late May. During the harvest cycle a slave man was expected to begin at dawn and to cut forty-two hundred canes a day. These would be bound in bundles of ten canes by a woman partner in the fields and carted for processing to the mills, which began operation at 4 P.M. and ended at 10 A.M. the following day. Because canes were perishable, milling and manufacture of a crude crystal sugar had to take place amid the cane fields themselves. The bulky cane was fed into rollers, and the squeezed-out juice was moved through copper kettles where it was boiled, skinned, and purified over a raging fire that was stoked by slaves. Cooled syrup was poured into conical pottery molds and placed on racks in a purging house to allow molasses to drain off and leave the sugar to crystallize. After slave women separated white from dark or muscavado sugar, the sugar was crated for market and a tithe extracted.

Slaves who were skilled artisans and those experienced in the stages of processing sugar benefited from supervisory and managerial positions in the mills. On most engenhos there was also a small cadre of salaried technicians, overseers, and artisans who were vital to the different stages of sugar production and processing. Mestres oversaw the milling of the estate cane. Semiautonomous tenant farmers, sharecroppers, renters, or landowners, called lavradores de cana, depended on nearby engenhos for refining and processing cane under a variety of arrangements that included paying half of the value of the processed sugarcane to the mill owner. Most lavradores were white, and some owned land and slaves; but they were generally considered a social cut beneath the planters, with whom they shared the risks and costs of planting, poor harvests, and low international market prices. Some lavradores became wealthy members of the local elite and established their own mills; many cemented formal labor relationships to prominent landowners with informal ties such as godparenthood or service in the estate militia.

The early sugar mills used presses until the first quarter of the 1600s, when a three-roller mill reduced to a handful the numbers of slaves needed at the mill, increased the average production of each slave from 0.25 ton to 0.5 ton of cane a year, and was adaptable to animal, water, or wind power. A further innovation was the replacement of a single cauldron for boiling by a battery of cauldrons in descending order of size and variable degrees of heat to control the process of clarification and evaporation.

Brazilian sugar production was the highest in the world under Spanish rule, from 1580 to 1640; but the Dutch occupied Bahia from 1624 to 1625 and controlled Pernambuco and much of the rich sugar-producing region from 1630 to 1654, and this enabled them to transfer cane agriculture and the technical advances of the vertical three-roller mill to holdings in the Caribbean. Sugar production thereafter continued to expand in Brazil, where this highly capitalized and commercialized product still accounted for high numbers of slave imports and as much as 90 percent of colonial exports. Brazil's monopoly was gradually eclipsed by expanding Caribbean competition, although other important factors included reduced capital resources available to planters, droughts, heavy rains, lower staple prices, rising costs of slaves, and a general slowdown of Portuguese commercial activity after 1650.
Alternative Plantation Staples

Slavery also influenced social organization and production in alternative agricultural activities, such as cattle ranching and tobacco, cotton, cacao, rice, ginger, dyewood, and indigo production. Cattle ranches initially developed to supply the coastal sugar industry with oxen, tallow, hides, and meat, but they rapidly expanded into backlands areas to meet increasing demands from the export sector. Slaves on cattle ranches generally worked alongside free people of color as cowboys; some slaves were also involved in herding cattle to regional markets, in slaughtering, in tanning hides, and in production of tallow. Slaves replaced Indians in the cultivation of tobacco, an associate crop of sugar that a less wealthy class of white planters grew in areas unsuited to cane production in Bahia and Pernambuco. High-grade tobacco was destined for European markets; lesser grades were soaked in molasses and increasingly sold along the West African coast as a commodity to be traded for slaves.

Supplied by the reform-minded marquis of Pombal's monopoly companies in the late eighteenth century and aided by British demand, planters imported large numbers of slaves to cultivate cotton in Pará, Maranhão, and the interior arid areas of Bahia and Pernambuco; this new source of revenue placed cotton second on Brazil's export list, after sugar. Some slave labor was employed in shipments of cacao from Pará, but since the cacao was a wild plant and was gathered by Indian laborers, plantations of the Venezuelan variety did not develop there. New plantation products did, however, engage large numbers of slaves as indigo and rice production responded to government efforts to diversify plantation agriculture in the central south. It was Brazilian coffee, introduced in the seventeenth century as an item of household consumption, that surpassed all other plantation staples as international attention focused on the high grade produced in the Paraíba Valley highlands inland from the capital city and court of Rio de Janeiro.

New Identities: Coffee, the Late Sugar Plantation, and Emancipation

By the 1830s coffee brought in more foreign exchange than sugar, shifting the postindependence economic axis from the sugar-producing northeast to Brazil's central south. The fazenda, organized as a large privately owned landed estate for raising crops or cattle, became associated in the nineteenth century with the large coffee estates, owned by elite merchant-planters holding titles in the bourgeois empire of the era with close ties to the corridors of power in the Brazilian court. The fazenda borrowed much from the engenho in terms of organization and widespread reliance on slave labor. Fazendas were all located near sources of water, timber, and stone, but their size and layout varied as much as the capital, land, labor, and social status of their sugar-producing counterparts. The great house, chapel, and gardens of the owner, his family, and their servants and dependents looked out on a broad, flat coffee terrace, surrounded by processing units, stables, managers' dwellings, and slave quarters. Slave quarters on Brazilian coffee estates were generally located near the great house, although this did not suggest any corresponding social proximity. Slave quarters varied in style, ranging from thatched-roofed wattle-and-daub freestanding huts, reminiscent of West African village styles, to multiple-family units. On large estates slave housing consisted of wooden barracks constructed around the coffee terrace; this arrangement allowed for close surveillance of a sizable slave labor force.

On most coffee fazendas, slaves numbered between two hundred and five hundred, although holdings of slaves reached one thousand or more on complex diversified units of production. Male slaves were preferred, although the labor requirements of coffee accommodated slave children, elderly men and women, and increasing numbers of locally recruited free farming families. Space and gender were factors in the specific duties of field labor. Weeding was handled in gangs that separated older people from younger, more able-bodied men and women. Men and women shared in planting, hoeing, weeding, and harvesting activities. On the basis of interviews with ex-slaves, Stanley Stein (1985, pp. 163–164) described one such gang labor system, termed corte e beirada, in which the best hands were spread out in flanks, with the cutter and backup at one end of a flank and two more leadrow men at the other end. These four among them set the work pace for slower workers, who worked between them as they moved up the rows of coffee, urged on by whip-wielding overseers.

For slave and some free field laborers, specialized tasks not related to coffee production were gender-related. Slave men with special training worked with free men felling trees, burning and clearing forests, digging ditches, mending fences, overseeing and supervising other slaves, serving as bodyguards and estate militia for the landowner, and driving and guiding mule trains. They generally handled the taming and training of horses and the construction and maintenance of fences and corrals. Pasturing and "shepherding" were tasks for women and children, as was the care of animals belonging to resident farmers and to slaves.
In the 1840s and 1850s the coffee economy reached its apex in the western Paraiba Valley, were coffee production for the international market was initially concentrated. Railroads increasingly replaced mule trains and provided cheaper alternatives to precarious fluvial and overland transport between coastal ports and the hinterland. In the following decades expansion into neighboring provinces threatened eventual overproduction and, together with falling prices and stocks unsalable in international markets, aggravated credit shortages at home.

Coffee production, like that of other plantation staples that depended on abundant and inexpensive sources of slave labor, was irreversibly affected by the Euzebio de Queiroz Law that suspended the transatlantic slave trade in 1850. Ushering in the transition from slave to free labor, gradual measures ensued which reflected increased public dissatisfaction with slavery. In 1869 laws prohibited the separation of slave mothers from their infants. Two years later, the Rio Branco Law declared all babies born of slave mothers to be conditionally free. Intensifying abolitionism radiated inland from Brazil's urban centers in the 1870s and 1880s, fueling growing resistance movements by slaves. When a law in 1886 outlawed whipping of slaves, they responded by gradually abandoning the plantations and the masters who had held them in lifelong captivity. On 13 May 1888, the approximately 700,000 remaining slaves were officially emancipated by the Lei Áurea (Golden Law).

The Euzebio de Queiroz law set in motion a refashioning of labor on Brazilian plantations. The drain of slaves through the interprovincial slave trade to the coffee areas of the central south forced many northeastern planters to recruit locally available free labor. Except for recalcitrant coffee planters who resisted labor alternatives to slavery, similar practices were adopted in Rio de Janeiro, Minas Gerais, and Espírito Santo as rising costs and diminishing supplies of slaves compelled planters to replace aging male African field slaves with native-born slaves, including larger proportions of women and children, and to engage ex-slaves and local free farming families as sharecroppers or tenant farmers.

In the expanding coffee areas of São Paulo and in certain other southern localities, the formation of the free labor market was managed through the employment of indentured Chinese laborers and hundreds of thousands of European immigrants, called colonos, who, under often coercive conditions, took up the tasks of clearing land and planting, weeding, cultivating, harvesting, and processing coffee beans that had traditionally been handled by slaves.

Diversification of agriculture and modernization of the rural sector were primary goals of the repub-

lic that replaced the monarchy on 15 November 1889. Coffee and sugar continued to be the post-emancipation mainstays of the export economy, and lacking government incentives to implement major structural changes such as land reform, planters' responses to modernization and mechanization were very mixed. Shortages of credit, high tariffs, and market insecurity, compounded by the planters' resistance to changing long-established traditions of large landholdings, dependence on slavery, and monoculture, contributed to their resistance to technological advances. On engenhos reorganization involved the establishment of central processing factories, or usinas, but only a few planters took advantage of related improvements such as new and better varieties of sugarcane, steam power, linked horizontal three-boiler units, vacuum pans to lower the boiling point of the cane juice, and centrifuges that used high-speed rotation to separate the molasses from the crystals. On progressive coffee fazendas machines were imported to dry, roast, and burnish harvested coffee beans, but in the fields the labor-intensive methods of cultivation remained unchanged. On the whole, technological improvements were adopted by only a small number of usina and fazenda owners, who, despite official subsidies, modernized their estates with their own resources.

Plantations survived emancipation and continue to be large privately owned landholdings where cattle raising and the production of coffee and other staples are carried out with cheap and abundant labor, perpetuating the unequal social relations that characterized the plantation complex since early times.

See also BRAZIL; ECONOMICS OF SLAVERY.

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Caribbean Region

Spain’s loss of territory throughout the Caribbean basin in the seventeenth century to its more commercially oriented European rivals, most notably the British, French, and Dutch, set the stage of the development of a sugar plantation complex based on the labor of African-born slaves and their Afro-Caribbean descendants. For over two centuries, slave-worked plantations made the region the world’s dominant producer of sugar, the richest plantation crop in the Americas during the slavery era and also the most valuable commodity of world trade by the eighteenth century.

The Caribbean’s tropical maritime climate—frost-free and equable year-round temperatures and abundant, well-distributed rainfall—and its fertile soil provided optimal conditions for growing sugarcane, and cultivation of it spread throughout the Greater and Lesser Antilles and adjacent mainland territories, especially the Guianas. This natural potential provided conditions in which Europe’s commercial nations brought modern, capitalist agriculture into being through development of the slave-worked plantation. On-site processing of the cane, through crushing in a large central mill and a carefully controlled process of boiling the sweet, crystalline residue from its juice, made very large, integrated enterprises the most efficient way to organize sugar production. England’s island colonies led production through the seventeenth century as the core characteristics of this plantation complex took shape. The output increased through the eighteenth century, by the end of which, joined by the production of the French, Dutch, and Danish colonies, it had reached its peak. By the nineteenth century plantations in the Spanish Caribbean—Cuba, Puerto Rico, and Santo Domingo—provided most of the world’s slave-grown sugar.

Mature Caribbean sugar plantations achieved economies of scale with workforces and landholdings far larger than those found in other American colonies and exacted more onerous labor than any of the other major staple crops. Slavery, which let planters disregard workers’ welfare because of the ready availability of cheap replacements through a flourishing traffic in new captives, allowed unprecedented levels of technological sophistication in the agro-industrial organization of Caribbean plantations and developed labor-intensive production of an export-oriented tropical staple destined for consumption in the metropolis based on the sugar economy’s access to banking and credit, efficient transportation, and integrated markets. Plantation-organized slavery made the sobriquet “sugar revolution” an apt description of the plantation era in the Caribbean.

The plantation complex reached the Caribbean during the mid-seventeenth century, when the Dutch introduced its basic features to the English colony of Barbados in the 1640s, using their experience with slave-grown sugar in northeastern Brazil. Local planter elites transformed the then-small settler colonies of the Lesser Antilles by buying up arable land and consolidating it into great estates devoted exclusively to cultivation of sugar. Growing importations of slaves facilitated by the Royal African Company (chartered in 1672) and a steady out-migration of poor whites dispossessed of their smallholdings left these islands with populations, 75 percent of whom were enslaved Africans, that anticipated the demographic profile of later Caribbean plantation societies. Within decades 80 percent of Barbados—essentially all the arable acreage—was in sugar.

British Jamaica and French Saint Domingue, the two much larger islands in the Greater Antilles, consolidated sugar plantation slavery in the Caribbean in the eighteenth century and steadily outstripped the production of the smaller Lesser Antillean colonies. British and French planters and their Dutch counterparts also expanded sugar cultivation into the mainland regions of the Guianas; even the tiny Danish Virgin Islands joined what had become a sustained sugar boom. When slave revolt, competing sources of sugar, and emancipation crippled these plantations in the nineteenth century, the plantation complex relocated to the Spanish islands, especially Cuba.

The coerced labor of million of slaves made the Caribbean’s sugar plantations viable. The Atlantic slave trade grew dramatically in the eighteenth century, as small independent “free” traders replaced the monopoly chartered companies that had financed its start-up investments in slave labor forces. The islands’ appetite for enslaved African workers remained voracious beyond even the expansion of lands devoted to sugar because of the failure of Caribbean slave populations to sustain their numbers through reproduction. During the eighteenth-century reign of King Sugar, at least four million Africans—some sixty percent of the entire transatlantic traffic for the period—landed in the Caribbean, with the British and French colonies taking more than two-thirds of them. The Spanish Caribbean’s continued involvement in the slave trade through the first two-thirds of the nineteenth century, after suppression of the transatlantic traffic elsewhere in the region, brought an additional...
three-quarters of a million slaves, or more, most of them destined for Cuba. Although new imports from Africa (called bozales in the Spanish islands) were thus constantly introduced into sugar estate workforces, the percentage of slaves born in Caribbean (termed creoles) grew throughout the plantation era, particularly as rising prices for new captives in the late 1700s encouraged plantation managers to try fostering reproduction rather than to continue to build their labor forces through purchases. The demographic profile of imported Africans reflected planters’ preference for men over women (at a ratio two to one) and for slaves of prime working age, but over time reproduction shifted Caribbean plantation slave communities toward more normal population proportions.

The plantation achieved its efficiency largely through its strict discipline of the slaves working in the cane fields. The work regime featured gang labor geared to sugarcane’s fourteen- to eighteen-month growing cycle. Hand implements, particularly the hoe and cutlass, remained the basic tools. Slaves covertly resisted adaptations to more sophisticated production: fears of slaves sabotaging expensive equipment, for example, increased planters’ reluctance to invest in even such modest technological innovations as the plow. The growth of a population of trained, skilled creole slaves did allow some technological advances in the key central operations of processing the raw cane to semifinished sugar. Flat, low-lying Barbados replaced animal-powered mills with windmills, while more mountainous colonies harnessed the power of fast-flowing streams with water mills, but slave workers on each estate still had to plant and harvest the crops. In the Spanish Caribbean slavery survived into the era of steam power in the middle third of the nineteenth century, which allowed even greater concentration of sugar processing. Centralized factories, or centrales, also used such other nineteenth-century technological advances as vacuum dryers and railroads, and although some planters and mill owners preferred free or indentured labor for the more mechanized job assignments, slaves’ work schedules too were adapted to accommodate such work, in addition to their field labor.

The gang system usually assigned male and female slaves at peak working ability to the first (or “great”) gang, augmented with lesser “second” and “third” gangs of physically less capable younger and older slaves. “Pickaninny” or “hogmeat” gangs introduced slave children to regimented labor at very early ages. Some British planters lightened the workload of pregnant women and mothers with newborn children by
introducing "sucklers" gangs, as they attempted to foster natural reproduction among their slaves after closure of the slave trade in 1808. Not all plantation slaves worked in gangs, however, and "colored" creole slaves of mixed African and European ancestry did so rarely, if ever. Domestic servants attended to the estates' white residents, and skilled slaves worked in trades and other essential services, particularly in the sugar mills and boiling houses, and as drivers and craftsmen. Male slaves dominated these elite positions, and with fewer opportunities for non-fieldwork, women were disproportionately represented in the gangs. On mature plantations up to 20 percent of slaves were not field hands. Only a handful of whites, almost all men and headed by the planter-owners or their agents and managers, lived on the plantations, directing and supervising slave work.

The plantation imposed a brutal labor regime on the slaves. During planting and tending seasons ("out-of-crop") field slaves worked a sunup-to-sundown schedule, extended by "before-day" and "after-day" preparatory and cleanup jobs. During harvest ("in-crop") processing the sugarcane in the mill followed (or preceded) the field labor throughout the night, burdening slaves with eighteen- to twenty-hour workdays. This timetable underwent little change even after nineteenth-century mechanization in the Cuban sugar industry. Slaves had only Sundays and occasional holidays free from the otherwise relentless pace of plantation production, and they had to spend considerable amounts of this respite growing provisions to supplement the meager protein rations provided by their owners. By the later eighteenth century slaves' marketing of their surplus provisions was providing most of the islands' fresh produce and had become a central component of the slaves' independent economic systems.

Elaborate and solid stone-built great houses and the sugar mill and boiling houses dominated the plantation landscape. Indeed, ruined or restored mansions and white residents' housing, water- and windmills, aqueducts, and boiling and curing houses still dot the Caribbean countryside. Although some planters assumed responsibility for providing slave housing, for the most part slaves had to build their own huts, mostly family dwellings, using local materials. Some huts housed unrelated slaves of the same sex, however, and during Cuba's more highly industrialized sugar boom some planters constructed large same-sex barracks.

An 1830 watercolor of the Caribbean Island of Saint Lucia; note the slave village with farm plots on the right. [Beinecke Lesser Antilles Collection at Hamilton College]
The debilitating work and the inadequate food, housing, clothing, and medical care that Caribbean plantations imposed on slaves resulted in high infant mortality, ill health, despair, and shortened life expectancies. In these conditions planters could rely only on violence to coerce labor, which kept their grim arsenal of weapons, such as whips, shackles, and chains, in constant use. Slaves nonetheless resisted and struggled to transcend the wretchedness of their lot. Their strategies of challenging the conditions of their bondage ranged from overt, organized rebellion to covert, individual opposition. They also created community and family lives of their own with an extraordinary tenacity that the discipline of plantation slavery could not suppress. The millions of men and women who toiled, lived, and died enslaved in the Caribbean thus confronted the rigor of early capitalist plantation labor exploitation with resourcefulness, aspiration, dignity, courage, and humanity.

Successful planters increasingly escaped the harsh realities of plantation life by opting for residence back in the metropolis, leaving only a tiny number of whites living in the Caribbean. A manager or overseer would take the place of an absentee planter, heading a small cadre of white supervisors permanently attached to the estate. Slaves vastly outnumbered Europeans: by the middle of the eighteenth century, Jamaican estates had slave-to-white population ratios of fifty or sixty to one, and even greater disparities occurred later in the century in Saint Domingue. Very few white women lived on plantations, and sexual liaisons between the white men and slave women, sometimes consensual but often coerced, prevailed. Sexual licentiousness thus characterized plantation life, where debauched and degraded white men routinely took slave women and girls as their concubines, while defiling and raping others without compunction. The children born of these unions made up the plantations' growing "colored" populations of slaves and grew up to work as domestics and artisans, or in other skilled jobs, but never as field hands. They also had greater, if still remote, chances of being manumitted.

A comparatively limited number of plantations in the Caribbean grew crops other than sugar. Saint Domingue, for example, led the world in the production of coffee, as well as of sugar, by the second half of the eighteenth century, and Jamaica also raised coffee and minor staples like pimiento, cotton, and indigo. These estates were organized on considerably smaller scales and employed fewer slaves in less arduous labor regimens. They exhibited the same preferences for male rather than female slaves, for gang labor, and for creoles rather than bosales. Slaves there resisted their bondage in ways similar to those of their sugar-plantation counterparts.

The Caribbean has sometimes been described as a pure plantation economy, a totally monocultural system oriented solely toward exports to metropolitan markets. Sugar cultivation most closely approached this degree of dominance in Barbados, but it was never achieved. Although sugar production for export remained dominant, the large scale of these plantation economies generated domestic production and local exchanges—livestock pens and produce farms, as well as slave-marketing networks—to support the plantations or to sustain the urban civilian and military populations of the region.

Caribbean populations also depended on integrated trade networks throughout the Atlantic basin, other than with the metropolis, for food and clothing for the slaves, and for livestock, wood, metal, and manufactures to process the sugar crop. Beyond consumer markets for the sugar they produced and swift transportation to get it there, the metropolitan countries principally provided financing for these capital-intensive endeavors.

The mature plantation system in the Caribbean shaped an integrated local colonial society around maximizing the export economy's profitability. The planter elite and their representatives controlled local politics and headed a white community, living mostly in the colonies' port towns, whose livelihood depended nonetheless on the rural plantation economy. Planter interests dominated the colonial administrations. The significant metropolitan military presence in the Caribbean colonies served as much against the persistent threat of slave revolt as to guard against attacks by colonial rivals. A close correlation between class and color shaped the colonies' hierarchical social orders, derived, of course, from the dominance of white owners over enslaved blacks on the plantations. The free colored urban populations present in all parts of the Caribbean grew from the plantation-based sexual control of white males over female slaves. Thus, the classic eighteenth-century slave-based plantation system throughout the region created a hierarchy of caste and race, as well as gender, with planters heading a tiny white and predominantly male population at the apex of the societal pyramid, with coloreds, free blacks, and slaves—creoles and African bosales—classified beneath them by status as free or slave and by gradations of color.

The black majority of enslaved plantation workers, once freed in the nineteenth century to pursue their own interests rather than those of their owners, destroyed, diminished, or transformed the plantation complex in the Caribbean. The successful slave revolt in Saint Domingue in 1791 led to the creation of the independent republic of Haiti in 1804, and the former slaves of the erstwhile French sugar and coffee
A map from A True and Exact History of the Island of Barbados by Richard Ligon (1657) identifies several plantations in existence at the time. [Beinecke Lesser Antilles Collection at Hamilton College]

plantations there overwhelmingly rejected further involvement with plantation labor in favor of family peasant production. Subsequent efforts to rebuild the island’s sugar economy around plantations failed to overcome the population’s determination to work for themselves. The end of the apprenticeship accorded the slaves of the British Caribbean full freedom in 1838, and emancipation came to the French islands in 1848, with similarly corrosive effects on plantation production formerly dependent on coerced labor. Planters attempted various initiatives to replace the former slaves with tractable workforces of other sorts, but with only limited success: for example, they tried to keep the former slaves dependent on plantation employment by limiting access to land of their own, and so checking the development of an independent peasantry. They also imported indentured Chinese and East Indian coolies under contracts that imposed terms of employment comparable to servitude. However, emancipation irrevocably eroded the labor discipline on which the plantation system had thrived, introducing steady, sometimes dramatic, decline in the export economy everywhere throughout the Caribbean. Yet in today’s highly mechanized but economically precarious Caribbean plantation complex, the coercion of poverty has driven the descendants of the slaves to provide most of its limited labor needs, in a bitter legacy of the system that held their ancestors in thrall to that “sweet malefactor,” sugar.

See also CARIBBEAN REGION; ECONOMICS OF SLAVERY; SPAIN.

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