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Review of *The Sugar Industry and the Abolition of the Slave Trade, 1775-1810*, by Selwyn H. H. Carrington

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The *Diligent* delivered 256 African captives to Martinique; nine captives died during the Atlantic crossing, as did four of the thirty-seven crew members of the ship. However, the voyage did not prove to be the success that its outfitters in Vannes, the brothers Guillaume and François Billy and Mr. La Croix, had anticipated. In his stirring reconstruction of the failed voyage of the *Diligent*, Harms has succeeded in revealing “the various ‘worlds’ through which it passed and the various local interests that conditioned its impact and outcome” (p. xx). That, in the end, is the book’s most striking achievement: connecting the most important elements of the worlds of Europe, the African coast, the Atlantic Ocean, and the Americas to offer a broad-ranging and illuminating account of the Atlantic slave trade.

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SELWYN H. H. CARRINGTON. *The Sugar Industry and the Abolition of the Slave Trade, 1775–1810*. Foreword by COLIN PALMER. Gainesville: University Press of Florida. 2002. Pp. xxii, 362. \$59.95.

In his foreword to Selwyn H. H. Carrington’s exhaustively researched book, Colin Palmer heralds it as “likely to be the most important work on the economic history of the Caribbean and the relationship of the state of the island economies to abolition and emancipation since Eric Williams published *Capitalism and Slavery* in 1944” (pp. xvi–xvii). Both the strengths and the limitations of Carrington’s study are engendered by this lineage, particularly by its core “economic decline thesis,” developed by the eminent Caribbean historian Lowell Ragatz in 1928, linked by Williams to the 1807 abolition of the British slave trade, and rejected ever since by those North Atlantic historians who have preferred a philanthropic and largely metropolitan genealogy for slave trade abolition. Although Carrington himself does not always pursue the wide-ranging possibilities that his data tantalizingly suggest, his book may well help to outline new plots and recast the dramatis personae for future studies of empire, slavery, and the political economies of the Atlantic world.

Carrington’s extensive research in colonial archives as well as in plantation accounts and owners’ and managers’ personal papers in both the Caribbean and Britain has produced statistical data on an array of questions relating to the condition of plantations and the sugar economies in the British Caribbean between 1775 and 1807. They persuasively demonstrate what Williams had proposed in 1944: that the American Revolution disastrously disrupted the proscribed but vigorous intercolonial trade that sustained (with both supplies and markets) the British Caribbean sugar industry, and that in strictly enforcing the Navigation Acts after the revolution, the Sheffield ministry effectively destroyed the Caribbean economies dependent on sugar production and trade through higher costs

(for supplies and shipping) and taxes on cash-strapped and debt-ridden producers ill equipped to cope with the new conditions.

Carrington’s data show how the subsequent crises affected not only plantation owners and merchants (the usual suspects in studies of the West Indian sugar industry and abolition) but also the other residents of the sugar colonies, enslaved and free, whose diets, life expectancies, fertility rates, work, and welfare were intimately affected by the costs and accessibility of food, material, shipping, and markets. Chapters on “New Management Techniques and Planter Reforms” and “Hired Slave Labour” show the range of strategies plantation owners and managers, colonial assemblies and governors adopted to deal with these conditions and with the higher slave morbidity and mortality rates precipitated by the war and exacerbated by the peace. They also demonstrate the extent and variety of conflict within plantations and colonies, among colonies, and between the different colonies and the metropole over management of the plantation economy and of the enslaved labor on which it was based.

Indeed, a major strength of the study lies in its abundant illustration of the heterogeneity of the West Indian colonies. Carrington’s data suggest that both Colonial Office contemporaries and historians who have relied primarily on the records they produced consistently generalized about the islands on the basis of the most influential planters and prolific commentators on Barbados and Jamaica, themselves the earliest and biggest of the West Indian sugar producers, respectively. In so doing, these informants and sources may have (by extension) obscured the wide variety of local conditions and resources that shaped colonial West Indians’ responses to both British colonial policies and international developments like the American, French, and Haitian revolutions. Here, Carrington’s focus on the decline debate overshadows other questions that may be more significant in the long run not only to the historiographies on abolition of the British slave trade (and, indeed, of slavery a quarter-century later) but also to the study of the complex political economies of empire and the Atlantic world.

For example, given Carrington’s evidence about the acknowledged significance of the American trade, to what extent did fear of slave insurrection and piracy incline West Indian sugar producers toward the empire and its naval might through the end of the American War for Independence? To what extent did the Haitian Revolution contribute to the abolition of the British trade in enslaved Africans? Given the production and commercial conditions Carrington’s data present, what inspired investors and the Colonial Office to invest in expanding sugar cultivation in Trinidad and Demerara, acquired from the French in 1797? While Carrington does not address these questions directly, his book makes an invaluable contribution to a number of fields, not only in the data it presents but also in the future research that the study,

with its generously annotated primary source bibliography, will enable.

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JOSEPH C. DORSEY. *Slave Traffic in the Age of Abolition: Puerto Rico, West Africa, and the Non-Hispanic Caribbean, 1815–1859*. Gainesville: University Press of Florida. 2003. Pp. xvii, 311. \$59.95.

Recent advances in knowledge of the ocean-borne segment of the transatlantic slave trade serve to underline how little, by comparison, we know of the movement of slaves both before they boarded, and after they left, the vessels that completed the middle passage. Joseph C. Dorsey's book has the rare merit of attempting to integrate all phases of the movement of people from Africa to the Americas, albeit for a forty-five-year period for one Caribbean island, Puerto Rico. Most unusually for a slave-trade monograph, it addresses non-African immigration as well, with the whole approached from a commendable transnational perspective. In the process the book deals with the rarely discussed topics of the later Dutch, French, and Danish intra-Caribbean traffic, as well as the movements of slaves from British to Spanish Caribbeans. Moreover, the author is not averse to bringing in Asia when appropriate. Although Dorsey's central interest and expertise is Puerto Rico, his book has chapters on Africa as well as the Americas, and, in addition, many passages on both slaves and the organizations of people that brought them to the Americas that are genuinely transatlantic in focus. This is an unusual range, even in an era of growth in Atlantic history.

Perhaps because of this ambitious agenda, the author does not always have his material under control, and the reader is left unclear about the overall thrust. The main findings are that most Puerto Rican slaves arriving direct from Africa came from Upper Guinea, and that, compared to Cuba, a larger share of slaves brought to Puerto Rico came from other parts of the Americas. Further, many more non-Hispanics were involved in both direct and intra-American traffic to Puerto Rico than to Cuba. There is much new information on intra-Caribbean relations between European colonial authorities, on the details of slave trader operations in Africa, on British-Spanish diplomacy in relation to Puerto Rico, and on individual cases of illegally imported slaves and *emancipados*. Dorsey claims that he has "considered the symbols, meanings, mobilities, and ironies endemic to slave commerce in the Age of Abolition and their implications for socio-cultural history" (p. 210). This is all we have for a thesis, but the reader may still have difficulty illustrating the statement.

Two patterns observable in many other branches of the slave trade do, however, emerge in Puerto Rico, although the author notes neither. First, the intra-American slave trade was never major as long as direct trade with Africa was possible. It tended to emerge

when a market for slaves was first developing but was not yet large enough to absorb the numbers normally carried on a transatlantic vessel. It then fell off as the direct trade with Africa began, and reemerged when transatlantic supplies were restricted, either by colonial policy, as in the pre-1789 Spanish case, or, later, because of abolitionist measures. The trade from the Old South to the New and the traffic from northeast to southeast Brazil are the largest examples. Dorsey never attempts to estimate the volume of slave arrivals from either Africa or from the Caribbean, but it would seem that Caribbean sources of slaves arriving in Puerto Rico were minor before 1846, when the transatlantic trade shut down, and then jumped in 1847. Second, Puerto Rico was a minor market for slaves when compared to Cuba and Brazil, and as with many other small slave markets (e.g. Martinique and Guadeloupe versus St. Domingue), could not compete for slaves in the major African provenance areas. Cuba did draw slaves from Upper Guinea, but most Cuban and all Brazilian-bound slaves arrived from West-Central Africa and the Bights.

Readers should beware of other problems. Nearly half the tables and over one third of the endnotes reference the British Parliamentary Papers. It is nowhere explained that the author has used the Irish University Press edition of this source, whereas most scholars will be looking for the much more common original edition that has quite a different organizational base and different year, volume, and page references. More fundamentally, Dorsey has not bothered to go behind these printed documents and into the British Foreign Office Slave Trade Department records (F084, available on microfilm), from which nearly all of the printed documents are drawn. The originals, complete with marginal minutes, would have explained many of the policy issues that baffle him and provided much additional information on the Puerto Rican slave trade. They might also have improved his grasp of the complex nineteenth-century anti-slave trade treaty structure, as well as allowed him to broaden his analysis of the Puerto Rican slave trade beyond the few vessels that happened to be captured. (His sally into FO84 is restricted to a few volumes of correspondence between the British consul in Puerto Rico and London.) Many secondary sources are also missing, and there are more than the normal quotient of errors of fact and misunderstandings. In short, this book is impressive in conception but disappointing in execution.

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DONNA R. GABACCIA and FRANCA IACOVETTA, editors. *Women, Gender, and Transnational Lives: Italian Workers of the World*. (Studies in Gender and History.) Buffalo, N.Y.: University of Toronto Press. 2002. Pp. xvi, 433.