

"Indispensable" – Eric Hobsbawm



# The Sociology of Slavery

ORLANDO PATTERSON

# CONTENTS

[Cover](#)

[Dedication](#)

[Title Page](#)

[Copyright](#)

[Introduction to the 2022 Edition: Life and Scholarship in the Shadow of Slavery.](#)

[Preface](#)

[I The Masters: An Overall View of Slavery.](#)

[Section 1 The Development of Jamaica, 1655-1834](#)

[Section 2 Political Development and Structure](#)

[Section 3 The White Society During Slavery.](#)

[Conclusion](#)

[II The Slave Plantation: Its Socio-Economic Structure](#)

[Section 1 Description and Estimated Costs of the Plantation Works](#)

[Section 2 The Personnel](#)

[Section 3 Annual and Daily Cycle of Work](#)

[III The Treatment of the Slaves in Law and Custom](#)

[Introduction](#)

[Section 1 The Legal Basis of Slavery](#)

[Section 2 The Development of the Slave Laws](#)

[Section 3 The Nature of the Laws in their Relation to the Actual Condition of the Slaves](#)

[Conclusion](#)

[IV An Analysis of the Slave Population of Jamaica](#)

[V The Tribal Origins of the Jamaican Slaves](#)

Part 1 The Sources of the Slave Population

Part 2 The Demand for Slaves in Jamaica

VI The Socialization and Personality Structure of the Slave

Section 1 Creole and African Slaves

Section 2 The Adjustment of the African Slave

Section 3 The Socialization of the Creole Slave

Section 4 Mating Patterns, Parent-Child Relations, Kinship, and the White Out-Group

Section 5 An Analysis of 'Quashee'

VII Social Institutions of the Slaves: 1 Witchcraft, Sorcery and Religion

Part 1 Supernatural Beliefs and Practices of African Origin

Part 2: Christianity and the Slaves

VIII Social Institutions of the Slaves: 2 Economy, Recreation and Control

Section 1 The Economic Life of the Slaves

Section 2: Internal Patterns of Control

Section 3: The Recreational Patterns of the Slaves

IX The Mechanisms of Resistance to Slavery 260

Part I Passive Resistance

Part II Violent Resistance

X The Cultural and Social Development of Jamaica: 1655-1865

Appendix 1: Stephen Fuller's Account of the Number of Negroes imported and exported at Jamaica each year, 1702-1775

Appendix 2: Exports from Jamaica, 1768

[Appendix 3: General Return from the Island of Jamaica, for Fifty-Three Years, ending 31st December 1836, abstracted from the Journals of the House Assembly](#)

[Appendix 4: Output, Income and Expenditure in 1832](#)

[Appendix 5: Manuscripts and Official Publications Consulted](#)

[Official Publications](#)

[Other Official Publications](#)

[Appendix 6: Europeans in West Africa; Seventeenth to Eighteenth Centuries](#)

[Appendix 7: Africa as known to Europeans in the Mid-Eighteenth Century](#)

[Plate Credits](#)

[Index](#)

[Plates](#)

[End User License Agreement](#)

## List of Illustrations

Introduction 2

[\*\*Figure 1\*\* Relative Percentages of Slaves Disembarked in Jamaica and North America](#)

[\*\*Figure 2\*\* A Counterfactual Picture of Jamaican Genocide: Jamaican & North American Slavery C...](#)

## List of Tables

Introduction

[\*\*Table 0\*\* Number of Slaves Disembarked in Jamaica from Embarkation Regions of Africa, 1601...](#)

## Chapter 2

[\*\*Table 1\*\* Output and Number of Negroes on Eleven Estates](#)

## Chapter 4

[\*\*Table 1\*\* Slave Population of Jamaica, 1658-1795](#)

[\*\*Table 2\*\* Slave Population of Jamaica, 1800-1829](#)

[\*\*Table 3\*\* Estimate of Population Growth, Net Importation, and Rates of Natural Increase of...](#)

[\*\*Table 4\*\* Increase, Decrease and Total Population of Slaves 1817-1829](#)

[\*\*Table 7\*\* Fertility Among a Sample of 77 Childbearing Slaves](#)

## Chapter 9

[\*\*Table 1\*\* Slaves in the Work-Houses of Jamaica: 1794 & 1813](#)

# **Dedication**

For  
C. L. R. JAMES

# **The Sociology of Slavery**

**Black Society in Jamaica, 1655-1838**

**With a new Introduction**

ORLANDO PATTERSON

polity

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Formerly Enslaved Jamaicans (c 1870s)

# INTRODUCTION<sup>1</sup>

## Life and Scholarship in the Shadow of Slavery

*The Sociology of Slavery* was not simply my first scholarly book, but the academic and deeper intellectual as well as sources of all my later works on slavery, race and freedom. The slave plantations and their post-emancipation incarnations have profoundly influenced Jamaican society. For me, their presence could not have been more personal and pervasive. When I was four years old, my mother and I moved to Lionel Town in the centre of one of the island's main sugar-producing areas. The only adequate preprimary school in the area was located in the church hall of a once elegant Anglican church in a bleak village called the Alley, once known, incredibly, as the Paris of Jamaica in the 18th century, and I was sent to live in the home of a family friend who was a foreman on the Monymusk estate, one of the island's oldest, owned in the mid-18th century by Sir Archibald Grant who also owned a slaving station in West Africa that directly provided the estate with its enslaved. The house was located literally in the midst of the cane fields. A narrow dirt track ran from alongside it through a dark, dirt-poor village of wattle and daub huts, the former habitation of enslaved workers, in which the Indians, who had been brought over from India to replace them, still lived. The emaciated stiff bodies of the men clad in dhoti loincloth, the dull glow of the women's hollowed eyes as they stared back at me and the other Black children, squatting before their rice pots above the wood fire on the ground, left an indelible impression on me. In hushed tones, the older children would often tell me: 'Dat's where

di slave dem used to live.’ We moved to May Pen for my primary school, the then small capital town of Clarendon, once surrounded by sugar plantations and cattle pens: Sevens, Halse Hall, Suttons, Moreland, Amity Hall, New Yarmouth, Parnassus, only a few, like Monymusk, still going strong, most marked by the ruins of great houses shrouded in thorny bush – Bog, Parrins, Carlisle, Paradise, Exeter and Banks. From my childhood I began to wonder what life was like for the enslaved whose violently enforced labour made it all possible, imaginings made vivid by the scary duppy stories, told at dusk, by the older children and grandparents of the ghosts of the enslaved still haunting the eerily hot spaces around the silk cotton trees of the lonely country roads leading from the town.

West Indian history had just begun to find a place amid the imperial history that still dominated the colonial curriculum of my primary school with its *Royal Readers*, as well as my secondary education, focused on British history and literature, and I seized every chance to study it. My very first research project was a study of the Morant Bay rebellion, the revolt of former Jamaica enslaved in 1865 that was ferociously put down by the colonial authorities, savagely aided by the Maroons. It won the national essay prize of the Jamaica History Teachers’ association in 1957 and confirmed my decision to study history should I win a scholarship to the recently formed University College of the West Indies. I did win a scholarship to the university, but to my great disbelief, in a typical act of learned imperial arrogance, the Black, Naipaulian mimic men who then ran the university ordered me to major in economics, which was being instituted for the first time in my freshman year and did not have enough applicants, my pleas and those of my distraught high-school history master simply brushed aside. Fortunately, the Economics Department was really an inter-disciplinary group dominated by two eminent

social anthropologists, R. T. Smith and M. G. Smith, the sociologist Lloyd Brathwaite, and the demographer George Roberts. All recognized the centrality of history and enslavement for any understanding of the Caribbean. This included the economists of the department, George Cumper and, later, George Beckford. Indeed, Beckford saw the slave plantation and its later developments as so critical for any understanding of West Indian economy that he developed, along with the economist Lloyd Best, what became known as the 'Plantation Model' of the Caribbean economy and society. In addition to these interdisciplinary scholars, with whom I was later to work in the New World Group of Caribbean intellectuals, I developed strong friendships with fellow students who shared my historical view of Caribbean scholarship, particularly the political economist Norman Girvan and the historian Walter Rodney.

There were, however, other forces that pulled me to an engagement with European thought and culture, both in my study of slavery and on the development of Europe's culture of freedom. I arrived in London to begin my research on slavery in 1962, in what was to be the most exciting decade in the modern cultural history of Britain. I soon became deeply immersed in three networks of friends and fellow intellectuals: the West Indian student community, focused on the West Indian Student Centre in Collingham Gardens, Earls Court; the newly emerged *New Left Review* group that had broken off from the old Oxford New Left; and the literary group of West Indian writers and artists that came to be known as the Caribbean Artists' Movement, founded mainly by the poet-historian Edward Kamau Brathwaite, its first meeting being held at my flat in London.<sup>2</sup> My involvement with the West Indian Students' Union mainly kept alive my engagement with the broader West Indian society, in much the same way that the University of the West Indies (UWI) had earlier done, and

my commitment to return to Jamaica to give back and help in its post-colonial development, a necessary pull, in view of the nearly irresistible temptations of intellectual and cultural life in Britain of the sixties.

My involvement with the new *New Left Review* group (which had emerged in 1960 from the merger of E. P. Thompson's *New Reasoner* and Stuart Hall's *Universities and New Left Review*) came not long after the Perry Anderson take-over that basically sidelined Thompson and the older post-communist left that had started it. I became deeply involved with the group, eventually joining its editorial board, through my relationship with Robin Blackburn, whom I met during his freshman year at LSE after he had been sent down from Oxford. I was soon immersed in the many strands of Marxist thought of the period. Although Blackburn was later to write major studies on slavery and abolition, in his early years he showed little interest in the subject. To the degree that slavery was ever mentioned, it was focused exclusively on the Marxian theory of the slave mode of production, on which Perry Anderson was to later write at length.<sup>3</sup> Nonetheless, my later deep involvement with the origins and development of European culture and the role of slavery in the emergence and persistence of its central value, freedom, originated in those intense discussions on the crisis of the left, and the problem of where in the world was Europe going, which preoccupied us in our fortnightly evening sessions. Interestingly, only one member of the circle of intellectuals we cultivated ever expressed any interest in the archival work I was doing on slavery in Jamaica at the time and that was the existential psychologist R. D. Laing, then the rising star of the anti-psychiatry movement who, after one of our meetings when I had vainly raised the subject of the real enslaved of 18th-century Jamaica in contrast to the abstraction of the slave

mode of production, pulled me aside and asked what I had learned from my studies about the existential reality of slavery. My answer intrigued him, and I was both surprised and flattered when, a few days later, he invited me to address his experimental group of residential schizophrenic patients and their therapists at Kingsley Hall in Bromley, East London. It was my very first public lecture on slavery, drawing on my dissertation research, my audience, apart from Laing and the other resident psychotherapist, Joseph Berke, being a deeply attentive group of English psychotics, among whom was the then unknown English painter, Mary Barnes who, after the talk, led me by the hand on a guided tour of her grease crayon paintings. Their questions, and the fact that they found the subject so personally engaging, led me to focus more on the problem of the social psychology of slavery that appears in [Chapter 6](#) of *The Sociology of Slavery*.

There was one other important personal experience in England that greatly influenced the writing of *The Sociology of Slavery*. Not long after we arrived in England, Norman Girvan, Walter Rodney and I received a note from C. L. R James, summoning us to a weekly meeting with him at his London apartment (we never figured out how James came to know of our existence). We obeyed, of course, read every item on the reading list he sent us and, for the better part of a university term, we literally sat at the feet of the great man - there were not enough chairs in his modest flat, but the seating arrangement was symbolically appropriate - and listened to his interpretation of Marxism, with its strongly Trotskyite slant. James, of course, had been a friend of Trotsky, so the three of us were simply awed at the fact that we were getting the true vision of Marxist theory from someone who had got it from the horse's mouth of one of Marxism's founding fathers. Interestingly, James made no attempt to change my

approach to the study of slavery in Jamaica, grounded theoretically more in Hobbes than Marx and, indeed, encouraged me to probe as deeply as I could into the lives and mode of survival of the enslaved. His deep interest in Caribbean society superseded any theoretical interest he may have had when discussing my work with me. Never once did he raise the subject of the slave mode of production. He had only recently returned from Trinidad, where he had been deeply involved with the decolonization movement before his final split with Eric Williams and was writing the appendix to the 1963 edition of the *Black Jacobins*,<sup>4</sup> entitled, 'From Toussaint L'Ouverture to Fidel Castro', to which he occasionally referred during our meetings.

The contrast with my New Left associates could not have been greater. We both agreed that, as West Indians, all our problems and cultural distinctiveness originated in slavery and the succeeding colonial situation. At the time, James was also writing one of his great classic studies, *Beyond a Boundary*, on the role of cricket in West Indian culture; his very grounded treatment of the subject was similar to my own approach to Jamaican slavery and underdevelopment. James was also instrumental in the publication of my first novel, *The Children of Sisyphus*, which he recommended to his publisher, without even asking me, after reading the manuscript that I had nervously left with him after one of our meetings, later writing a long and very favourable review article on it.<sup>5</sup> My admiration, and gratitude for all I had learned from him during those Friday evening listenings, was partly expressed in the dedication of *The Sociology of Slavery* to him.

*The Sociology of Slavery* was the first book-length study of Jamaican slavery and slave society. It is also among the first studies *in English* to focus in its entirety on the culture, social organization, cultural life and attitudes and modes of

resistance of the enslaved, in the New World. There were, of course, many book-length and other studies on Jamaica before, but they were focused mainly on other aspects of the society – its politics, economy, demography, flora and fauna, climate, the white ruling class and so on, or general studies with a chapter on slavery in general. Oddly, even the more recent scholars of Jamaican history who immediately preceded me seemed to have deliberately avoided any direct treatment of the subject. Douglas Hall, for many years chair of history at UWI, wrote his dissertation and most important work, *Free Jamaica*,<sup>6</sup> on the immediate post-emancipation period, the same relatively brief period covered by Philip Curtin<sup>7</sup> in his published dissertation, *Two Jamaicas*. Indeed, with the notable exceptions of C. L. R. James' *Black Jacobins* (first published in 1938), Eric Williams' *The Negro in the Caribbean* (1942)<sup>8</sup> and *Capitalism and Slavery* (1944),<sup>9</sup> and Elsa Goveia's *Slave Society in the British Leeward Islands at the End of the Eighteenth Century*,<sup>10</sup> which appeared two years before *The Sociology of Slavery*, this avoidance of slaving and the enslaved as the *focus* of research, was true of all the English-speaking historians writing on the West Indies. Reference was, of course, made to the enslaved in many of these earlier studies, but rarely to their way of life, and no one had written a book-length study. I drew on the most important of these studies, especially Lowell Joseph Ragatz's *The Fall of the Planter Class in the British Caribbean, 1763-1833*,<sup>11</sup> Frank W. Pitman's *The Development of the British West Indies, 1700-1763*,<sup>12</sup> George Roberts'<sup>13</sup> *Population of Jamaica*, and M. G. Smith's paper on the early 19th-century British Caribbean.<sup>14</sup> The authors of the latter two were my undergraduate teachers, and Smith's paper was of special importance in pointing the way towards how a sociologist would approach the study of slavery. Although he wrote



nothing on slavery in Jamaica, another of my teachers, the British anthropologist, Raymond Smith, was important in my study of the enslaved family, since I adapted his theory of the developmental cycle of the household, which he had derived for the anthropologist, Meyer Fortes, in writing about the subject.

It is hard to imagine it now, but before *The Sociology of Slavery*, with the partial exception of Kenneth Stampp, there was not a single book-length study in English focused on the social and cultural practices of the enslaved and their responses to their enslavement, by any professional historian writing on the West Indies and North America. U. B. Phillips, the dominant, white-supremacist historian on U.S. slavery up to the middle of the century, wrote on aspects of enslaved life, especially in his slightly less racist, *Life and Labor in the Old South*,<sup>15</sup> but as part of his wider pro-Southern study of the slave South, as were similar chapters in the broader studies of plantation slavery in Mississippi by Charles Sydnor.<sup>16</sup> A change occurred among white scholars following the civil rights revolution, especially in the revisionist work of Kenneth Stampp,<sup>17</sup> which challenged the prevailing pro-Southern works of U. B. Phillips and others; and there was the important comparative works by Tannenbaum<sup>18</sup> and Klein.<sup>19</sup> While anti-slavery and sympathetic to the enslaved, none of these works by white historians was wholly focused on the life of the enslaved and culture although Stampp's book was exceptional in devoting over a third of the volume to these subjects. Both Tannenbaum's and Klein's works were concerned primarily with the question of the differences between Latin American and U.S. slavery. Stanley Elkins'<sup>20</sup> work, which compared slavery with the Nazi concentration camp in arguing that there was more than a core of truth in the infantilized image of blacks reflected in the slaveholder's Sambo stereotype, was indeed focused on the

life and thoughts of the enslaved and, while his comparison with the Nazi concentration camps was not as far off the mark as so many critics claimed, he erred, not so much in identifying similarities in the psychological responses of Jewish inmates and slaves but in his interpretation of the meanings and significance of these behavioural and psychological strategies of the enslaved. The work was published in 1959 and still in vogue when I was researching *The Sociology of Slavery*. Indeed, my critique of the work's basic argument was among the first to be published and became the concluding chapter of Ann J. Lane's collection of critical writings on the Elkins book.<sup>21</sup>

The situation was different among the pre-civil rights era of Black American intellectuals, historians and sociologists, among whom the experience of slavery and its consequences for later Black life was of great importance and figured prominently in their debate with racist scholars in the Jim Crow South. I read many of these Black scholars as an undergraduate, partly at the urging of one of my teachers, Lloyd Brathwaite. A passage from a paper written in 1898 eloquently expressed DuBois' views on what was missing in the study of slavery: that while a great deal had been written on the legal and political aspects of the subject, 'of the slave himself, of his group life and social institutions, of remaining traces of his African tribal life, of his amusements, his conversion to Christianity, his acquiring of the English tongue ... of his whole reaction against his environment, of all this we hear little or nothing, and would apparently be expected to believe that the Negro arose from the dead in 1863'.<sup>22</sup> Sixty-four years later, that is exactly how I felt about the study of the Jamaican past as I prepared to enter the archives of the British Records Office and British Museum.

Not long after *The Sociology of Slavery* was published, the situation changed dramatically and a tide of scholarly

works on Jamaica appeared. These works fall into two broad categories, which may be called *dominion* and *doulotic* studies. Dominion studies are those primarily concerned with the rule and rulers of the island; the nature of its macro-level socio-political system and economy, in the context of which its enslaved, as human capital, are considered; and, in keeping with one common meaning of the term, studies on the island's existence as 'a country that was part of the British empire but had its own government' (Merriam-Webster). Doulotic studies are those mainly concerned with the island's enslaved population, seen from the enslaved's perspective, their demographic development and modes of socio-cultural survival, resistance, and adjustment to the system; the micro-level relations of domination between enslaver and enslaved; the meso-level nature and conflicts within the plantations, pens and other localized units of production, as systems of total domination; and the functioning of slavery as an institutional process.<sup>23</sup>

Jamaica has been fortunate in having outstanding scholars who have written major works from one or other, or both, of these perspectives. B. W. Higman surely ranks near, or at the top, of scholars who work on West Indian slavery with a special focus on Jamaica, with works from both perspectives. His monumental study of the historical demography of the West Indies serves scholars working from both perspectives and will continue to do so for years to come.<sup>24</sup> For decades, before retiring to Australia, he worked in Jamaica, producing world-class scholarship on Jamaican and West Indian slavery, from his base at the University of the West Indies where he trained generations of West Indian historians. His meso-level work on Montpelier plantation<sup>25</sup> shifts the focus to the doulotic and the 18th century and stands comparison with the Jamaican part of Dunn's masterpiece comparing plantations in

Jamaica and Virginia.<sup>26</sup> I hasten to add that I disagree with several findings in Higman's works, especially his revisionist view of the enslaved's familial relations, which was too influenced by U.S. cliometric studies, and his rather too sanguine view of the system as a whole but, having already published these disagreements, there is no need to repeat them here.<sup>27</sup> Approaching Higman's and Dunn's doulotic works in depth and quality are those of Trevor Burnard who has fast become the most prolific student of Jamaican slavery, writing from both perspectives. His study of Thomas Thistlewood's relations with his enslaved workers<sup>28</sup> brings the study of Jamaican slavery down from that of the meso-level unit of the plantation to the micro-level of what Marx called the 'relation of domination', a term I borrowed for my own comparative study of slavery. If there ever were any doubts about the conclusion I arrived at in *The Sociology of Slavery*, that Jamaican slave society was a Hobbesian state of savage exploitation and, with the possible exception of the enslaved in the Laurion silver mines of ancient Attica, the most brutal in all history, Burnard's probing re-examination<sup>29</sup> of Thistlewood's world has disabused us of them. An impressive body of work is further illuminating the doulotic perspective on the system, a rigorous recent example of which being Justin Robert's<sup>30</sup> comparative study of the kinds and intensities of labour activities and the sickness and mortality rates of the enslaved in Jamaica, Barbados and Virginia, which nicely complement's Dunn's comparative work.

An important and growing number of works have brought sex and gender to the forefront of doulotic studies.<sup>31</sup> *The Sociology of Slavery* was the first modern book on Jamaica, and the second (after Goveia) on the West Indies more broadly, to discuss at length the triple exploitation of enslaved women on the plantation - their disproportionate

representation in the fields and limited occupational opportunities, the sexual abuse of their bodies, the burdens of reproduction – and their sometimes anti-natalist attitudes as a form of resistance against the system.<sup>32</sup> I wouldn't presume to think that my work influenced the many fine studies on women in Jamaican slavery that followed it,<sup>33</sup> but this I can say: the study of their plight in Jamaica was first explored in *The Sociology of Slavery*. While this emphasis on gender is to be applauded, I am somewhat concerned with the overemphasis of most of these works on the late abolitionist era of slavery. In this regard, the works of Kathleen Wilson,<sup>34</sup> Katie Donington<sup>35</sup> and Diana Paton<sup>36</sup> show that there is no shortage of data for the study of gender in the early 18th-century period of the society. Some authors have also been inclined to defend the sexual virtue and heroism of enslaved women, and their presumed propensity for the nuclear family, as if their survival under the genocidal and rapine conditions of slave life were not enough.

Rhoda Reddock's bracing Marxist-feminist studies have stoutly challenged this historiographic line.<sup>37</sup> The attempt to impose the Western nuclear family on West Indian working-class women, she shows, has failed, both during and after slavery by missionaries and middle-class do-gooders, and one lesson she draws from her comparative study of Caribbean slavery is that 'Love of motherhood was neither natural nor universal.'<sup>38</sup> The works of Randy M. Brown,<sup>39</sup> mainly on Berbice, of Patricia Mohammed<sup>40</sup> on Jamaica, and of Kamala Kempadoo on the Caribbean,<sup>41</sup> have forcefully advanced this realistic and unsentimental feminist agenda, which recognizes that among poor and working-class Caribbean women from the period of slavery until today, as Kempadoo well puts it: 'Sexuality is strongly linked to survival strategies of making do, as well as to

consumption, which in itself is often seen as a prerequisite for survival. It is not always conflated with intimacy or love, nor necessarily, when economically organized, seen to violate boundaries between the public and private.’<sup>42</sup> My work on Jamaican slavery, as well my ethnographic field studies of the Kingston poor in the early 1970s, fully bear this out, and I make no apologies for pointing out that sex work was one of the strategies of survival by enslaved women in the misogynistic nightmare of Jamaican slave society. Slavery was drenched in violence, rape an integral part, and tragically, the violence of the enslaver against the enslaved seeped down like a viper’s poison through the veins of the entire system, deep into the relations among the enslaved themselves, especially between older, more advantaged enslaved men and women, intimate violence that we still live with in the West Indies, especially Jamaica, where violence against women, members of the LGBTQ community, and other vulnerable groups, is endemic.

The works of Michael Craton deserve mention in any review of the literature on Jamaican and broader Caribbean slavery, if for no other reason than its prolificity, especially his works on Worthy Park. *The Sociology of Slavery* was the first work to use materials on Worthy Park. I had been told of their existence by a friend who had worked in the offices of the estate and, when I visited it in 1964, I was provided with a box of materials on the enslaved and space to work on them. I had expected more from what my friend had told me, but thankfully made the most of what I had been handed. I was very surprised when I read the announcement of a book on the plantation in late 1969, to be published the following year.<sup>43</sup> I was then a lecturer at the University of the West Indies and a colleague of the distinguished Jamaican economist, George Beckford. We immediately developed a joint research project focusing on the historical development and present socio-economic

structure of the plantation, went to Worthy Park and sought permission from the owners to conduct our research. We were flatly denied access to the family papers and most of the archives, although told that we could do what we wanted with the workers.<sup>44</sup> Eight years after the first, dominion-type study, Craton's large doulotic study of the plantation appeared.<sup>45</sup> Craton and Walvin are not to be blamed for the denial of access to us of the estate's papers, which was quite consistent with the racist attitudes of the Jamaican planter class. Although critical of the repeated unctuous posturing towards favoured members of the Caribbean academic community, and several analytic flaws, my review of the work was generally favourable, my judgment being that he was 'not only a first-rate historian but acute observer of contemporary mores'.<sup>46</sup> Unfortunately, that view had to be changed after it became evident from later works that Craton was a repeatedly dishonest scholar. Sidney Mintz, the eminent, well-tempered Caribbeanist, has upbraided him for his habit of appropriating 'concepts developed and legitimized by other scholars whose works are well known', while citing them for trivial contributions many pages later, as in his appropriation of the Australian anthropologist Peter Wilson's concepts of reputation and respectability in Eastern Caribbean peasant life.<sup>47</sup> Mintz is also unsparing in pointing out Craton's other academic flaws and pretensions in the course of a devastating critique of his book on slave revolts, noting passages that are 'ill-informed or evasive', 'misleading', and the 'insouciant use of concepts unfamiliar to the author'. In another work Craton subjected Mintz himself to this duplicity, prominently entitling a paper on slave revolts 'Proto-Peasant Revolts?' The concept of the Caribbean slave as a proto-peasant was conceived and fully developed by Mintz and well known to Caribbeanists but unlikely to be known to the readers of *Past and Present*,

who would only be informed near the end of the paper that Mintz had 'coined' the term without citing the Mintz paper, where it was clearly evident that he had done more than simply 'coined' the term, instead citing a paper Mintz had co-authored with Douglas Hall.<sup>48</sup> Perhaps the most egregious act of academic deceit committed by Craton was his report of my interpretation of the personality of the Jamaican enslaved in their interaction with their enslavers, discussed at length in [Chapter 6, Section 5](#) of *The Sociology of Slavery*. There I pointed out that there was a stereotype of the enslaved known as 'Quashee' in Jamaica, equivalent to the U.S. slaveholders' infantilized stereotype of the African American enslaved, known as 'Sambo', that had recently been made famous, for many infamous, by the American historian Stanley Elkins. My argument, which in one crucial respect was critical of Elkins, was that Quashee, far from reflecting the true nature of the enslaved, was a case of the enslaved 'playing fool to catch wise', in the words of a famous Jamaican proverb and was, in fact, a psychological mode of resistance or what James C. Scott later called a 'weapon of the weak' in a work that correctly cites my view of the subject.<sup>49</sup> Incredibly, Craton reported in one of his papers that: 'Patterson describes the Quashy as a slave who fulfils the masters' degrading stereotype of the Negro; lazy, deceitful, temperamental, childlike if not dog-like' - an interpretation apparently reinforced by the modern Jamaican epithet 'Quashy Fool' for what Englishmen would call 'an ignorant peasant'.<sup>50</sup> This is the exact opposite of my argument, which, as pointed out earlier, was included in a well-known collection of critical works on Elkins!<sup>51</sup> What does one make of a scholar who writes many presumably major works yet is so repeatedly dishonest? I leave it to the community of historians of Caribbean slavery to decide.



*The Sociology of Slavery* concentrated on the sugar plantation sector of Jamaica's slave system and, while no one doubts that sugar dominated the entire economy and social order to the very end, it is a reasonable complaint that the work neglected the sectors of the economy not in sugar, especially those sectors producing coffee, livestock and other produce. The works of Higman,<sup>52</sup> Shepherd<sup>53</sup> and Monteith<sup>54</sup> have greatly illuminated these sectors. Higman<sup>55</sup> showed that in 1832 the sugar plantations contributed 58.5 per cent of the island's total income, compared with 12.6 per cent from the coffee plantations and 10.4 per cent from livestock pens.

My reason for not paying more attention to these sectors points to an important division in doulotic studies of slavery in Jamaica, recently highlighted by Burnard,<sup>56</sup> a division based on temporality. There were profound differences between the state of affairs in Jamaica between the century and a half prior to the abolitionist movement leading to the ending of the slave trade in 1807 and what came afterwards. *The Sociology of Slavery* covered the entire period of slavery but was firmly rooted in the classic earlier period of 145 years, fully 80 per cent of the entire period of slavery, for most of which the sugar plantation was indeed predominant and the vast majority of enslaved toiled on them. It was also when the system was at its most ruthless and, as Burnard notes, and I completely agree, 'All of us working on slavery in the period before abolitionism struggle with the realization that enslaved people's lives were miserable and stunted in ways that make it hard to see how Jamaican slaves could have led any sort of lives that held any meaning for them.'<sup>57</sup> Indeed, one may well turn the issue around and question the overwhelming emphasis on the last forty years of slavery by the majority of studies on the subject, not only those on gender as previously noted. This was the period of abolitionist

activism, with the planters' backs increasingly up against the wall in an ideological battle that they eventually lost. During this period, in response to the relentless criticisms of the horrors of the system they had created, they desperately tried to ameliorate it. After the ending of the slave trade the amelioration intensified, not simply in response to abolitionist rhetoric, but out of the stark realization by the slaveholders that if they were to procure more enslaved persons, they had to induce them to reproduce. How reasonable is it then, to base one's account of slavery in Jamaica on this last-gasp period of transition, to the neglect of the previous 80 per cent of the history of the system, which was the classic period of unrestrained wealth-generation based on the merciless exploitation of the enslaved and the protracted genocide of their recruitment, replacement and growth, made possible by the slave trade.<sup>58</sup>

Perhaps not. This is like confining a study of the history of racism and the economic exploitation of blacks in America to the post-civil rights era. And yet, remarkably, the great majority of works on slavery in Jamaica are confined to this period. What accounts for this bias? A clue to the answer is the apocryphal story of the drunkard who lost the keys to his home in the dark but kept looking for them under the streetlight, because that's where the light was. The data on Jamaica during the period of abolition are exceedingly, and temptingly, rich, accounting for the large number of historians of many nationalities attracted to the study of this period of the island's slavery. That's where the light is. Alas, that's not where the keys to most of the horrors are to be found.

Turning to dominion studies, the first post-war study from this perspective focused on the West Indies is Elsa Goveia's pathbreaking work on the British Leeward Islands.<sup>59</sup> Her opening statement on the work is a good definition of what

I am calling dominion studies: “The term “slave society” in the title of this book refers to the whole community based on slavery, including masters and freedmen as well as slaves. My object has been to study the political, economic and social organization of this society and the interrelationships of its component groups and to investigate how it was affected by its dependence on the institution of slavery.’ Goveia selected the Leeward Islands because they were among the most ‘mature’ of the British Caribbean societies and ‘analysis of its characteristics sheds light on the characteristics of plantation slavery and of “creole” society of the eighteenth century throughout the islands’.<sup>60</sup> Furthermore, it was Goveia who was first to apply the concept of creolization, which she did repeatedly throughout the work. Although she contrasted her position with mine in her review of *The Sociology of Slavery*<sup>61</sup> in arguing that the Leeward Islands’ slave system was ‘highly organized and integrated’, our positions were really not that dissimilar, since I am in complete agreement with her that that integration was entirely ‘on the basis of racial inequality and subordination of the labouring majority of blacks to the minority of whites’. Our views on the destructive nature of slavery on the familial and sexual lives of the enslaved are identical,<sup>62</sup> and my view that the slave system was best viewed as a collection of largely self-contained plantation units, certainly when viewed from the perspective of the enslaved – the essence of my doulotic approach – is identical to her own verdict that: ‘At the end of the eighteenth century each of the plantations ... was itself a small world, and the field slave was trapped in this world, like a fly in a spider’s web.’<sup>63</sup> Our principal difference was that she approached the system from a dominion or macro-level perspective. But there was another: she was writing about the Leeward Islands, whereas I wrote about Jamaica, a larger and much more

complex and unequal system, possibly the most pitilessly cruel and exploitative in modern history.

Higman has also written most extensively from the dominion perspective, as have an impressive number of other scholars. As I have already hinted, he somewhat normalizes the role of the white slaveholder class and the slave economic system, especially in his study of the managerial aspect of the plantation regime. His *Plantation Jamaica: 1750-1850*<sup>64</sup> is an important and necessary work, but one reads it with some unease, a bit like reading a meticulous analysis of the Nazi *Totenkopfverbände*, the SS Death's-Head Battalions that guarded and managed the concentration camps. Like all his other works, it is expertly crafted and thoroughly documented, and he is unsentimental in his approach to the subject, writing in the introduction:

Their business was exploitation and part of my task is to assess how efficiently they carried out that enterprise. It is only by taking this perspective that it is possible to understand the working of the larger system of plantation economy and the role of enslaved and free workers within the society. The people who did the hard work of the plantations remain essentially voiceless in the narrative, reduced to the tools of capital and themselves literally human capital. It is a harsh story.

Quite so. Nonetheless, other works such as Burnard's are consistently more critical.<sup>65</sup> From the older generation one may single out those of Brathwaite,<sup>66</sup> Sheridan,<sup>67</sup> the Bridenbaughs,<sup>68</sup> Greene<sup>69</sup> and Dunn.<sup>70</sup> It may strike some as odd that I have classified Brathwaite's work as a dominion study but, contrary to the popular view of the work as one focused on the life and culture of the slaves, it is largely devoted to the political, social and economic structure of the society and the role and attitude of the

whites: only 59 of the text's 312 pages directly examines the Black population. Brathwaite's work is strongly influenced by Elsa Goveia's study of the Leeward Islands, both in its attempt to interpret Jamaica during the same period of time as a systemic whole, and in his use of the creolization concept, neither of which is sufficiently acknowledged. In any case, his use of the concept of creolization is problematic in light of the still pluralistic and 'disunited' state of Jamaica and other West Indian societies emphasized by Goveia,<sup>71</sup> the failure to distinguish localization from creolization, and the assumption that creolization entails assimilation and harmony, especially in sexual relations and racial mixing. His extraordinary view that it was 'in the intimate area of sexual relations' that 'inter-cultural creolization took place' by engendering a mixed group that helped 'to integrate the society',<sup>72</sup> would certainly have been rejected by Goveia and, after the sickening revelations on Thomas Thistlewood<sup>73</sup> whose cruelty and insatiable sexual sadism Douglas Hall agrees was the norm in Jamaica,<sup>74</sup> must now be viewed with disbelief. The commonly held view that Brathwaite 'coined and deployed the term creolization as a theory of Caribbean culture', recently asserted by Kamugisha, is incorrect and puzzling.<sup>75</sup> The concept was long in use among linguists, and its extension to Caribbean cultural processes received its definitive theoretical formulation in a 1968 conference at the University of the West Indies (coming after Goveia's empirical use of the term), described by the Finnish creole scholar Angela Bartens as 'one of the major events which initiated the era of modern creolistics',<sup>76</sup> a quarter of whose attendees were social scientists and historians, myself included, that Brathwaite would certainly have known about.<sup>77</sup>

Prominent among earlier scholars who, in critical reaction against the acculturation studies of Herskovits, had clearly

articulated a conception of the Caribbean as a space in which creolization was the norm, was Sidney Mintz, who spent a lifetime researching the problem and developing a theoretical framework for understanding it.<sup>78</sup> One prominent creole linguist who has extended her work from language to the socio-cultural domain of what she calls the 'creole space' is Bartens, whose book is an important contribution to the historical sociology of creolization that deserves greater attention among Caribbeanists.<sup>79</sup> Given its roots in the study of language, it is perhaps not surprising that one of the most theoretically sophisticated and empirically informed works on the Jamaican creolization process is by the critically acclaimed British historian of French and Francophone Caribbean literature, Richard D. E. Burton.<sup>80</sup>

Mary Turner's<sup>81</sup> thoroughly documented, well-written work on the island during the same period covered by Brathwaite, paints a more complex, conflict-ridden system from which the religious sphere was not spared. The works of Sheridan, the Bridenbaughs and Dunn are especially valuable in placing Jamaica within its broader West Indian context, the latter two emphasizing the failure of early British Jamaica as a social system.<sup>82</sup> Greene's recent study offers a wealth of information on a wide range of social and economic activities, land use and demographic patterns at an unusual level of detail, and for the period of the mid-18th century too often neglected in recent studies.<sup>83</sup>

One quaint work on Jamaican slavery by the American historian Vincent Brown,<sup>84</sup> has left me and many historians from the region perplexed. According to Brown, the catastrophic mortality rate in Jamaica for both blacks and whites, far from hardening attitudes towards death, was the source of cultural creation, 'the principal arena of social life and gave rise to its customs'. This is a polished