for storing them in huge depots, like the Spanish archives. In earlier times the fragility of maritime communications between Europe and the Caribbean meant that many documents were sent in multiple copies, thus greatly increasing their chance of surviving down to the present day.

Some documents survive because their inherent beauty appeals to collectors. This is the case with many maps, and with books like the ones produced by the early Spanish writers. Of course, for books to be widely collected, there had to be an extensively literate populace, and a network of dealers. These conditions existed in Europe from about 1600 onwards. For the production of books about the wider world, it was also helpful if some geographical description already existed, and in this respect the tradition of geographical description already existed, and in this respect the early modern Europeans had cut their teeth with the medieval descriptions of the Orient.

Many documents go through different stages of vulnerability to destruction. Legal documents, for instance, are often carefully housed and protected as long as they are needed for current cases. After that time, though, there comes a time when they may be regarded as a nuisance, before a later period when they may be widely perceived as of historical interest. On the whole, legal documents generated in the West Indies seem to have been carefully preserved, often because even two-hundred-year-old papers may still have some relevance to modern problems.

Newspapers offer another example of these stages. Very few people preserve their daily papers, and they have a long period of vulnerability before they are of obvious historical interest. That is why most newspapers have to be consulted in libraries, which gathered them in as they were published. Maritime charts are another category of document that often suffers from immediate hard use. Very few of the sixteenth-century Spanish Atlantic charts survive, because they were probably so bedraggled after being used at sea that they were discarded. Only the copies prepared for presentation to high dignitaries stood a good chance of survival.

By and large it is probable that more documentary evidence has survived in the Caribbean than is generally imagined. Most of the islands now have reasonably well-run depositories, and a good many of these contain material dating back to the seventeenth century. The challenge for the historian is to track down this material, combine it with the metropolitan survivals, and then feed in the testimony of material culture, local linguistic evidence, and the rich offerings of local oral traditions.

Economic interpretations of Caribbean history

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The Caribbean in modernity

The Caribbean, as a conceptual invention of modern historical discourse, has been subject to ongoing analysis in which metatheoretical frameworks and paradigms have played an important part. Participants in the dialogues of its 'discovery', 'ownership' and 'identity', for example, from the early sixteenth century to the present, have tended to indicate the centrality of materialist considerations to any understanding of what essentially the 'territory' represents. Discussions, furthermore, have drawn upon theories and models that have generally emerged from the contexts of wider discussions in which the colonized world is (re)presented as an expression and a facilitator of larger socioeconomic processes that signify the onset of modernity in Western development discourse.[1]

The inescapable notion of the Caribbean as a core component of a modern Atlantic project, whose romanticized presence ruptured and revolutionized the norms of economic life within Europe, emerges from a view of the Columbus enterprise as the clinching moment of Atlantic self-realization. The centring of these small islands and surrounding mainland within this megatrend determined their status as a principal 'archaeological' site of modernity. The energy source of this transforming process was clear enough: promotion of a concept of economic development through strategies of commodity production, external trade, capital investment, and the generation of wealth. In this regard, the Caribbean performed two distinct functions: as a

1 William A. Darity Jr., 1982. See also Jack P. Greene *et al.*, 1984; Paul Gilroy, 1993, pp. 1–41; Gordon K. Lewis, 1983; Ralph Davis, 1973; K. G. Davies, 1974; Jack P. Greene and J. R. Pole, 1984.

metaphor that promoted the culture of speedy wealth acquisition, and as a showpiece of a paradigm of development within which theories of wealth creation and methods of material measurement were conceived and refashioned. Historians engaged in the description and analysis of the Caribbean experience, therefore, have been unable to escape the use, formal or unspecified, of theories of human conduct and development.[2]

The predominant economic vistas through which historians have framed the Caribbean compelled the foregrounding of images of materialist development and corresponding mentalities of wealth maximization. The broad picture depicts the meta-ideological discourse of the rise of capitalism, the rational ordering of human society, and the assumption of hegemonic economic power by Europeans within colonial contexts. The seventeenth-century expansion of the capitalist world order, stimulated by the Caribbean connection, networked through Atlantic trades and mass migrations, and articulated in terms of Enlightenment rationality, determined that grand economic theories should occupy historians whose task it is to explain and describe the twists, turns and tensions of these developments. General terms such as 'economic development', and specific concepts such as 'wealth' and 'capital', as well as new social agencies such as 'planter' and 'chattel slave', all came into popular use, but arrived laden with notions of human behaviour rooted in the formal analytical constructions of economic theory. Caribbean historians have embraced, with varying intensity, this discursive language of economics and its philosophical assumptions.

Applying economic theory

The use of economic theory in the interpretation of Caribbean history has been sufficiently broad methodologically to invite the observation that it represents a way of thinking about the past rather than an instrument of historical analysis. While some social historians, in particular, have been accused of dehumanizing the historical experience by the formal use of statistical theory and methods, there has been less concerted criticisms with respect to the explicit and implicit use of economic theory. Ironically, social historians, while counting slave populations with statistical sophistication, have also engaged in the embrace of economic theory. Since slaves constitute aggregates of capital investments which were valued in terms of measurable costs by their profit-maximizing owners, economic theory readily found its way

2 See B. W. Higman, 1985, pp. 19–20; Woodville K. Marshall, 1975.

into social history analyses through the use of statistical theory.[3] Techniques such as 'sampling', and concepts like 'averages' and 'standard deviations', for example, have had considerable significance for social historians because of their use of economic theory. Also, the ways in which they have employed 'correlation' and 'regression' analyses indicate their primary interests in understanding how and why measurable resources were distributed by market forces. In some instances it is also possible to discern the assumption of 'commonsense' with respect to economic thinking, particularly regarding the application of neoclassical marginal productivity theory to resource use, and the concept of 'elasticity' as it applies to the labour market.

There has been some tension, nonetheless, in the relationship between economic theory and the writing of history. Classical economic theory takes the appearances of capitalism for granted and does not attempt to discover what are the relationships specific to capitalism which make these appearances peculiar to it. Some Caribbean historians have had difficulty with this uncritical acceptance and have argued that in addition to the study of production, distribution and exchange, the social significance of these objects of analysis must be taken into account. The preoccupation of economic theory with the individual, furthermore, creates the systematic tendency to analyse economies in terms of the aggregate behaviour of single economic agents. Yet, capitalism openly displays social classes as concrete realities that cannot be ignored by the historian. It follows, then, that historians have had good cause to identify the inconsistencies in economic theory by indicating the complex structure of social relations and causation rather than accepting axiomatic methods of deduction. At the same time they have accepted, as a rule, that social reality can be better understood in the light of a few simple economic propositions.

In the development of Western economic theory, the Caribbean occupies a special place. It has not been a passive recipient of discursive economic thinking, but has stimulated, both directly and indirectly, the evolution of economic theory by virtue of its posing fundamental questions that provoked the formulation of new modes of thinking. In this regard, the Caribbean in the Atlantic World, and the Atlantic World within modernity, represent contexts within which economic theory developed and matured. As a result, Caribbean historians from the sixteenth century have participated in the evolution of economic theory in three ways: first, by examining and explaining the external economic relations of the region; second, by investi-

3 B. W. Higman, 1985, implies the parasitic nature of historians with respect to the use of social and economic theory. For an example of Caribbean demographers' (social historians') use of economic theory, see B. W. Higman, 1976b, Part III.

gating the internal economic logic of its historical experience; third, by applying to their craft 'popular' economic theories and methods in new and innovative ways, and by so doing facilitating the growing sophistication of theoretical formalization in history-writing.

Economic theory has a basis in broad economic and social reality. Generally, the informing ideas of economic theory emerge as part of the intellectual tension produced by debates over imposing social and political issues. Two general forms of use of economic theory can be found in the work of Caribbean historians: the subliminal and the formally specified. These categories are not discrete, but have related dialectically over time. First, it is necessary to identify the ideas of European economic theorists during the slavery and post-slavery colonial periods; second, importance should be attached to the ideas generated by contemporary Caribbean social scientists who, using the work of the former category, fashioned new theories which they claimed offer superior explanatory insights into indigenous circumstances. In the first category, mercantilist, classical, neoclassical and Marxist paradigms predominate. In the second category, the ideas of world systems, structural dependency, and plantation economy theorists have emerged as critical insider responses to the perceived outsider formalizations of Euro-centric, self-serving economic theory.

European economic thinking has not long been occupied with the issue of economic development. The contexts of colonialism, empire building, and their relations to the commercial transformation of traditional agrarian economy, stimulated the discourse. 'Trade and Empire,' Josiah Child, the English economic publicist noted in 1690, became the principal paradigmatic vision of Enlightened Europe. Child's generation of economic thinkers, supported by the political power of the imperialist state, successfully promoted the notion of their ideas as commonsense.[4] Euro-centricism in economic thinking, therefore, was articulated in terms of general development theory. This politicized intellectual project also sought to reduce ideological concepts such as 'nation' and 'culture' to a perceived 'natural universal order' whose operational principles Europe claimed to have discovered.

Claims to discovery, however, are always contested. In time, Caribbean scholars, driven by the political circumstances of nationalist decolonization, showed dissent by indicating the influence of political ideology on the formation of economic theory. The anti-colonial struggle, as well as the internal class and cultural contests it exposed (and at times concealed), promoted the perception of economics, and its theoretical assumptions, as ideology. According to Caribbean economists Richard Bernal, Mark Figueroa and

4 Josiah Child, 1693. See also Richard Pares, 1955, pp. 14–36.

Michael Witter: 'Put bluntly, economic ideas have served in Caribbean history to articulate class interests at the level of ideological struggle.'[5] Caribbean historians, nonetheless, by using economic concepts and theory validated a Euro-centric disciplinary vocabulary despite their stated difficulty with the interest it served. Broad agreement on methods of cost measurement, notions of surplus and profits, and the general goal of growth and development, for example, have facilitated historians' work despite their challenge to the universalist claims of economic theory.

Enlightenment political economy

Classical economic theorists in particular thought in wide analytic frames that privileged philosophical discourse. They assumed, for example, that both monopoly and free trade policies result from an understanding of individuals acting in a 'rational' manner as 'close calculators'. This assumption enabled them to formalize economic principles into conceptual constructions such as the theory of rent and the division of labour, and capital theory, as well as the labour theory of value. These and other economic theories have been used by historians of the Caribbean in order to interpret the origins and functions of colonial economy, its attendant labour systems, productive culture, trade relations, and consumption patterns.

Dalby Thomas in *An Historical Account of the Rise and Growth of the West India Colonies* (1690) set out the mercantilist theory of colonization. Colonization, he said, is but a migration by one part of a community to another place. The object of the migration is to explore trading activities, establish specialized economies, and interface with the home country.[6] The trading centre should be dependent upon the home country for external trade, and seek financial satisfaction from its activities. Over a hundred years later, classical economists, David Ricardo in particular, integrated these principles of colonization into an economic theory of development that rationalized the maintenance of colonies. The theory of comparative advantage, that proposes a territorial division of labour and specialization, occupies a central place within classical economics, and is generally used by historians of the Caribbean to account for the hegemonic rise and fall of the sugar-slave plantation culture.

Mercantilism, John Hicks tells us in *A Theory of Economic History* (1969), 'marks the discovery that economic growth can be used in the

5 Richard Bernal, Mark Figueroa and Michael Witter, 1984, p. 6; Stuart Hall, 1977.
6 Dalby Thomas, 1690; Ralph Davis, 1966.

national interest.'[7] It is within this context that historians have tended to discuss the origins of the colonial project in the Caribbean, particularly with respect to its varied relations to the aboriginal economy. The formal institutionalization of the Spanish imperial economy during the sixteenth century, and the bullionist economic theories underlying its organizational objectives and goals, have been well documented. The popular economic notion in Spain that treasure (gold and silver) was the principal form of wealth was indicative of the stage of economic development attained. The search for gold in distant lands was the specific shape which commercial expansion took. The economic theory that if money was scarce trade would decline, even though goods were abundant and cheap, facilitated a colonizing policy in Spain that aimed to increase the wealth of the realm.

The identification of money and treasure with wealth engaged the Catholic Church, Spanish monarchies and nobles in joint ventures with colonizing agents who were equally agreed on the commonsense and utility of dominant economic ideas. Historians such as Ramiro Guerra y Sánchez, Luis M. Díaz Soler, Franklin W. Knight and Sidney W. Mintz, have given good accounts of the establishment of Spanish settlements, population movements into, about and out of the Indies, as well as the nature of economic activities pursued. In this historiography it is more assumed than stated that colonizers understood the economic principles underlying and informing their social motives. Texts on the Spanish Empire in the Caribbean up to the mid-eighteenth century, are therefore explicit in the articulation of mercantilist bullionist economic theory.[8]

Interpretations of the economic development of Spanish Caribbean colonialism provide in several ways the backdrop for the definition and description of two other distinct processes: its integration and finally destruction of the autochthonous economy, and its competitive assault by market capitalism, principally in the form of English, French and Dutch imperial activities during the seventeenth century. The interactions of these processes constitute a fascinating field of enquiry for historians. A primary concern has been the need to categorize and analyse the economic cultures of Amerindian peoples so as to conceptualize the resources issue endemic to their encounter with Europeans; also, to determine the extent to which the defeat of Spanish colonialism in the region by Anglo-French-Dutch forces constitutes a stage in the Atlantic region's capitalist triumph over dying feudalisms.

7 John Hicks, 1969, pp. 161–2; S. L. Mims, 1912; Lawrence Harper, 1939; Geoffrey Walker, 1980; Rudolph C. Blitz, 1967; Charles Wilson, 1949.

8 Ramiro Guerra y Sánchez, 1927a (1964); Luis M. Díaz Soler, 1953 (1970); Franklin W. Knight, 1970; Sidney W. Mintz, 1953; Manuel Moreno Fraginals, 1978 (1976).

In the works of Sherburne F. Cook and Woodrow Borah, Carl O. Sauer, and David Henige, for example, the aboriginal economy is presented as one of several Atlantic pre-capitalist modes of production not driven by competitive market forces, profiteering, and the general pursuit of wealth through the accumulation of capital. The concept of native pre-capitalism, furthermore, engages two distinct traditions in economic thinking: the idea that in such formations economic activity does not constitute the principal evolutionary force; and that the social structures of such societies do not reflect a distribution of power rooted in the private ownership of property and other productive resources. Instead, the historiography expresses notions of collective ownership of property, absence of a market economy, restricted instrumentation of money, and generally the consumption of surpluses. Together, these features represent a social condition described in classical economics as backwardness and undevelopment.[9] Within Marxist economic theory, however, such an economy is categorized as communalist, a phase through which all societies pass *en route* to market capitalism. Mercantilists, however, saw economic backwardness in the colonial contexts as evidence of racial inferiority, since the market economy was for them an expression of high rationality rooted in the philosophical constructions of the Enlightenment.

The process of structurally integrating native economies is generally represented by historians as an inevitable consequence of capitalist penetration. Mercantilists theorized this process in terms of the construction of a national economy, integrated by global merchant capital, and governed by centralized imperial state authority. Marxist historians, in particular, speak about the rise of commercial capitalism and the emergence of a world system in which the colonized part is peripheralized and exploited. Paget Henry, for example, assessing the interaction of imperial Spain with the native Caribbean during the seventeenth century, noted:

> In the vast majority of cases, this transition [to peripheral capitalism] did not result in the complete destruction of the pre-capitalist formations. Usually, it involved the integration of the local economy into the world market ... That is, in spite of the violence of the period of initial penetration, the aim of the transition was the reorienting of the production of commodities in the dominated society and not its complete destruction. By subjecting the local economy to elements of capitalist reorganization, its products would become a part of a global system of capital accumulation.[10]

9 Sherburne F. Cook and Woodrow Borah, 1971; Carl Ortwin Sauer, 1966; D. Henige, 1978.

10 Paget Henry, 1985, p. 15.

As a result, a mining and agricultural economy emerged using enslaved native and African labour, indigenous crop-science and technology, and based also upon the forced extraction of surplus in the form of tribute payments by the colonized. These developments were consistent with the principles of economic thought in popular use within Spain, and indicative of the backward state of Hispanic capitalism.

Interpreting colonial capitalism

The Spanish-aboriginal interaction, furthermore, facilitated the pre-capitalist tendencies within the imperial economy. This perspective is found within most texts that detail the economic history of Spain and her colonies. The extraction of tribute by aristocratic *hacendados* for conspicuous consumption is depicted in mercantilist and classical economic thinking as a process hostile to capital accumulation. Likewise, the economic idea that colonial wealth is acquired in the storage of precious metals was discredited by English political economists by the mid-seventeenth century. Historians of the Caribbean, therefore, in portraying the economic stagnation and vulnerability of the Spanish empire, drew upon economic theory in order to demonstrate the economic backwardness of the world Columbus made.

Francisco Scaranò, for example, sees the economic history of sixteenth-century Puerto Rico in terms of its 'relative isolation from the international economy.' Such a circumstance, he says, fostered the growth of an independent, racially-mixed peasantry that produced a layered subsistence economy rather than an aggressive capitalism. Small-scale production, local marketing of small surpluses, and low levels of accumulation typified, he concluded, 'the economic foundations of peasant society.'[11] What was true for Puerto Rico was broadly the case for Cuba and Hispaniola. The issues here are not unfamiliar. Peasantries are portrayed as backward producers in as much as they are unable to invest and transform production along capitalist lines. Subsistence economy results from peasant-dominated economic cultures and requires radical disruption in order to be receptive to market capitalism as understood by mercantile political economy theorists and classical economists.

The rupture with 'primitive' Amerindian and 'pre-capitalist' Spanish colonial economy came with the settlement of the Lesser Antilles by English, Danish and French farmers in alliance with Dutch traders. Gabriel Debien, Robert Stein and Christian Schnakenbourg, among others, have documented for the French island colonies, Waldemar Westergaard for the Danish, and

11 Francisco A. Scarano, 1984, p. 4.

Richard S. Dunn, Richard Sheridan, Richard Pares and Hilary McD. Beckles for the English, how these entrepreneurial settlers undertook the formidable task of transforming the seventeenth-century frontier into a profitable agrarian, mercantile, capitalist economy.[12] Merchants and planters were the principal partners in this process that saw the emergence of the expansionist North Atlantic system. Both groups, motivated by unmitigated self-interest – the dominant ideological force in capitalist culture – differed fundamentally from their Spanish predecessors. They were set apart by the vigour of an expansive commercial ethos which linked colony to metropole by a complex system of finance and banking, the main objective of which was rapid capital accumulation through agricultural production and international trade.

The rupture, furthermore, is generally written about in terms of a capitalist breakthrough that revolutionized and refashioned the colonial economy in accordance with the images of the emerging global development paradigm. Centred around the establishment of large-scale capitalist productive units, known as plantations, and producing sugar and other commodities for global export, this transformation has been variously described as the 'sugar revolution', the 'plantation revolution' and the 'slavery revolution'. Debien, Manuel Moreno Fraginals and Pares produced pioneering work on the sugar colonies that focused upon 'merchants and planters' as the principal managerial agents and beneficiaries of the process. Impressed by their powers of capital accumulation during times of intermittent war and peace, and general political instability, Pares presents this entrepreneurial leadership as proof of the existence of advanced commercial capitalism in the colonial context. Sheridan and Dunn had no doubts about the revolutionary financial and commercial nature of the Caribbean élite. Dunn spoke in terms of the 'rise of the planter class' and described this élite as the single most important factor in accounting for the economic transformation of the West Indies. Sheridan, meanwhile, showed the manner in which the sugar planter represented the colonial extension and expression of metropolitan capitalism, plugged into European finance, marketing, and political protection.[13]

The spread of large-scale sugar plantation production into the Spanish colonies after the Seven Years' War, reproduced, according to academic historians of the 1970s and 1980s, similar capitalist organization and ideologies to those found in the French and English colonies. One result was that

12 Gabriel Debien, 1970; Robert Stein, 1980; Christian Schnakenbourg, 1968; Richard S. Dunn, 1972; Richard B. Sheridan, 1974; Hilary McD. Beckles, 1989b; Richard Pares, 1960; Waldemar Westergaard, 1917.

13 Richard Pares, 1960; Richard S. Dunn, 1972; Gabriel Debien, 1970; Manuel Moreno Fraginals, 1978 (1976); Richard B. Sheridan, 1961; Paul Bondois, 1931.

by the end of the eighteenth century, the entire region was revolutionized by capitalist production and placed in the managerial hands of an agro-commercial élite that had no doubt about the nature of its economic outlook and interest. In this substantial historiography several theoretical statements and assumptions are drawn from discourses in mercantilist political economy, classical and Marxist economics. Modern historians have borrowed heavily, for example, from the early debates on the nature of colonial capital accumulation. This was particularly evident with respect to understanding the economic features of plantation systems and, by extension, the character of the agro-commercial élite. There is also a general awareness that the wider discourse of which these issues are part is the nature of the transition from feudalism to capitalism at the moment of the colonial encounter.[14]

Conceptual tension in the categorization of the planter class arises in part from important analytical tendencies within economic theory. It is agreed that the planter's objective in the global mobilization of productive resources was to realize a surplus from the transfer of money into land, slaves and machinery. The combination and organization of these factors were designed to produce sugar and other commodities as an exchange value on plantations. The planter, then, according to the exchange-derived definition of capitalism, was undoubtedly a rational entrepreneur in pursuit of a surplus by factor combination at optimum rates. Such individuals were capitalists in that they entered production for the sake of exchange and the pursuit of a surplus.

This conception of class and ideology has some ancestry within Marx's labour theory of value as well as his contribution to the debate on the theory of rent. There are moments when he describes plantation owners as capitalists, though at the same time he acknowledges the incongruence between slave-based production and the capitalist mode of production. The tension derives from the perception of slavery as a social relationship that is backward and generally inhibiting of capitalist development. Maurice Dobb, for instance, argued that capitalism as a mode of production has little to do with the expansion of trade and exchange, but with the conversion of the worker to wage relations that are regulated by market forces.[15]

Within Dobb's Marxist analysis merchant capital is seen as the dominant, and ultimately controlling, part of the plantation enterprise. The merchant sought to buy cheap and sell dear, and succeeded in setting up this process for the sugar producer. Meanwhile, the merchant used his political influence over

14 Essays by Fé Iglesias Garcia, Manuel Moreno Fraginals and Francisco Lopéz Segrera, in Manuel Moreno Fraginals, Frank Moya Pons and Stanley L. Engerman, 1985; Arturo Morales Carrión, 1952; Patrick Bryan, 1978; Luis M. Díaz Soler, 1953 (1970).

15 Maurice Dobb, 1963; J. R. Mandle, 1972; Donald Winch, 1965; Jacob Price, 1989.

the imperial state in order to protect his capital, hence the monopoly economic characteristics of mercantilism. The planter, furthermore, is seen as a minimalist investor in technological and scientific knowledge because his ultimate objective is conspicuous consumption in the form of his desired mobility into the landed aristocracy. The plantation economy, then, is designed to deliver this social end and as a consequence slavery obstructs the market rationalization of the labour process. Capital accumulation becomes subordinate to conspicuous consumption and the planter to pre-capitalist relations and ideology. Slavery, the planter-merchant élite, and the plantation, then, are considered ideological expressions of pre-capitalist formation with the colonial context.

The historiography of sugar revolutions and the rise of the plantation economy stands against the background of mercantilist and Marxist economic theory, in particular the relation between monopoly and competition as instruments of capital accumulation. In mercantilist economic thought especially, the relation between economic organization and political structure, and between economic and political ideas and policies, must be viewed as one of interaction. The seventeenth century in Europe witnessed and privileged the building-up of nation-states. Economic principles, whether monetarist or protectionist, and other economic ideas, were regarded merely as instruments to this political end. State intervention was an essential part of all mercantilist doctrines. Furthermore, the very principles of regulation and restriction – applied on a much larger scale through monopolies and protection – constituted an essential basis of the state.

Plantation economy in the seventeenth century, then, with its requirements in slave trading and slavery, metropolitan credit and markets, and state protection, was designed as an expression of merchant accumulation, hence its particular framing within the economic theories of mercantilism. The high regard for money, for example, was indicative of the accepted doctrine that the economic process, viewed from the perception that commercialism was a primitive phase of capitalism, required money and credit rather than capital for sustainability. This reasoning emerged from an acceptance of the economic theory that the volume of trade was limited, and that the wealth of a nation increased when it enlarged its absolute share of this trade at the expense of other nations. The concept of a balance of trade as the principal measurement of a nation's trade advantage resided at the base of the monopoly and protectionist economic policies that typified mercantilism.

Economics and slavery

With respect to this historiography, however, the most explicit use of formal economic theory and general principles is to be found in the discourse relating to the precise origins and nature of large-scale slavery. Mercantilists had an unproblematic understanding of slavery in the colonies as merely an extension of the culture of coerced labour that obtained in normal productive relations within Africa and Europe. At home there was servitude, and in the colonies there was a mixed regime of servitude and slavery. The ideological discourse of domestic politics that tended towards the gradual freeing of workers did not mature in the colonies. Frontier conditions necessitated a rationalization of unfreedom with respect to labour. Slavery was the result, though it was recognized that ideas emanating from notions of ethnic difference did facilitate the movement towards chattel slavery as the extreme form of unfreedom.

The development of chattel slavery as the principal labour form throughout the Caribbean has not escaped extensive theoretical attention. The early imperial articulation of the climatic theory, which stressed an alleged physical inability of whites, and the ability of blacks to work efficiently on tropical plantations, was ultimately based upon notions of cost and productivity. The basic assumption was that there exists a relatively greater cost and lower productivity of white labour within the context of a supply crisis for white labour. Marx had indicated that in a free labour market the value, and accordingly the price, of labour power appears as the value, or price, of labour itself, or as wage. With slavery, however, there was a fundamental distinction:

> The slave did not sell his labour power to the slaveowner, any more than the ox sells its services to the peasant. The slave, together with his labour power, is sold once and for all to his owner. He is a commodity which can press from the hand of one owner to that of another. He is himself a commodity, but the labour power is not his commodity.[16]

The perception of the slave as a commodity enabled historians to employ the principles of classical economics by way of determining the market rationale for the origins and the duration of slavery.

Adam Smith's *Wealth of Nations* and Ricardo's *Principles* represent canons of classical economics. Integrating the concepts of human rationality and self-interest, as developed in Lockean and Hobbesian political philosophy, they and other classical economists were able to formalize labour theories of value, and supply and demand schedules for price determination, in such a way as to support the theory of the inherent natural order of

16 Karl Marx, 1968, p. 74; Karl Marx, 1867–95, vol. 1 (1976), p. 1032; Robert Miles, 1987, pp. 50–71.

economic life. Ricardo's theory of economic development, furthermore, was attractive to Marx, particularly the argument that in capitalist production surplus appears and is appropriated by the capitalist since capital receives a greater value than it gives. This enabled Marx to develop concepts of surplus value into a theory of labour exploitation that has sharpened modern historians' understanding of the economic nature of enslavement. These theoretical developments in economics, furthermore, offered historians a range of possibilities in the analysis of the origins of slavery as an economic system.[17]

Evsey D. Domar, for example, drew heavily upon the classical theory of rent in the formulation of his land-labour theory of the origins of slavery. In situations of open resources, such as those obtained at the frontier, he argued, capitalists have either to directly control labour or go out of business as profit maximizers. Workers in pursuit of rational self-interest would opt to work for themselves rather than sell their labour, driving everyone as a consequence into a subsistence peasant economy. When, however, access to land was limited, as was the case in the Lesser Antilles in the mid-seventeenth century, large-scale slavery emerged as the rational outcome of market calculations. Assessing the full implication of Domar's analysis, Barbara Solow suggests:

> Of the three elements of a simple agricultural structure – free land, free labour, and a landowning aristocracy – any two elements can exist, but not all three simultaneously. Where land is free, its ownership receives no return ... The development of such an economy depends on population growth and domestic capital accumulation. Growth may be vast in the long run but it will be slow to develop. But if society invents or adopts a productive asset (like slaves) in which capital can be immediately invested, the colony can be built up without waiting for population voluntarily to immigrate or capital to be generated.[18]

Slavery in the Caribbean, then, had the effect of enabling European savings to be invested more productively, by opening up new investment opportunities. The origins and development of the slave-sugar complex has therefore been explained in terms of classical economic theory which itself was formulated under the influence of specific circumstances generated by the colonial encounter.

The Domar hypothesis, furthermore, has been invoked more recently to explain the transition from white indentured to slave labour in British

17 Adam Smith, 1776 (1933), pp. 539–40; Eric Roll, 1978; Paul Thomas, 1970; Gary Hawke, 1980; Robert W. Fogel, 1967.

18 Evsey D. Domar, 1970; Barbara L. Solow, 1987, p. 56; H. U. Pappe, 1951.

America during the seventeenth century. The analysis is fundamentally classical. It assumes that slaveowners were essentially profit maximizers who wished to remain viable sugar producers. With the development of a bottleneck in the indentured labour market, planters were increasingly forced to turn their attention to an alternative labour resource, namely enslaved black labour. Marginal economic theory, then, became the historian's guide in explaining planters' long-term preference for slave labour. The purchase of slaves, furthermore, was considered rational within this construct. Marx supported the general classical position, and articulated the precise nature of the slavery transaction:

> The price paid for a slave is nothing but the anticipated and capitalized surplus value or profit to be wrung out of the slave. But the capital paid for the purchase of the slave does not belong to the capital by means of which profit, surplus labour, is extracted from him. On the contrary, it is capital which the slaveholder has parted with, it is a deduction from the capital which he has available for actual production ...[19]

The origins of slavery, then, within classical economic theory, were represented as an expression of economic and social rationality. Historians have tended to proceed on this basis, an indication of the extent to which scholarship on the Caribbean has embraced the fundamental theoretical assumptions of Western economic discourse.

With these theoretical understandings historians of Caribbean slavery and plantation economy have produced general surveys as well as case studies on 1) the shifting centre of high accumulation within the wider slave-plantation complex, and 2) the precise features of accumulation within particular colonies at specific junctures. The migration pattern of the Caribbean sugar plantation epicentre is well known: from Hispaniola in the sixteenth century to Barbados and the Leewards in the mid-seventeenth century, to Jamaica and St Domingue in the early eighteenth century, to Cuba and Puerto Rico in the early nineteenth century (with a minor tendency in Trinidad and the Guianas). The emergence of Barbados and the Leewards is commonly explained in terms of an English, Dutch and French strategic entrepreneurial clinching of a niche advantage at a time of market dislocation caused by a supply crisis (civil war in Brazil) in the largest producing territory. While the relatively high marginal cost of these (small) colonies was

19 Karl Marx, 1867–95, vol. 3 (1972), p. 809; Hilary McD. Beckles and Andrew Downes, 1987; Richard Bean and Robert Thomas, 1979; David W. Galenson, 1981a.

recognized, it is understood that initial high sugar prices and profit levels were more than compensatory.

The early eighteenth-century development of Jamaica represented proof that the sugar market, protected and regulated by the imperial state, would attract large-scale producers at lower per capita cost achieved by greater economies of scale. Similarly, the explosive expansion of the sugar industry in St Domingue in the mid-eighteenth century has been explained with reference to supply and demand factors; high cost producers in French Martinique and Guadeloupe were disadvantaged with respect to the imperial market as conceived in marginal economics. St Domingue became the colony of choice. The expansion of sugar plantations and slavery in late eighteenth century Cuba has also been explained within the context of a macro-economic shift occasioned by the penetration of Euro-American capitalist forces. British occupation of Havana during the Seven Years' War is frequently cited as the first of several critical moments in the capitalist reorganization of the Spanish Greater Antilles.

The tensions between imperial exclusivist policies and the increasing preference of colonial inhabitants for freer trade facilitated the maturing of crisis relations between political and economic ideology in the Spanish Caribbean. It was only a matter of time, historians have argued, before Puerto Rico and Cuba, 'stumbling blocks to [British] commerce and trade', succumbed to *laissez-faire* capitalism within the slave-based sugar plantation sector. The *Cédula de Gracias* of 1815 marked the formal abandonment of Spanish exclusivism, in practice as well as in theory. The pursuit of economic productivity in agriculture that resulted drew Spanish colonies to the economic centre of Atlantic capitalism, and by the mid-nineteenth century they were converted to an economic system not dissimilar to the 'sugar colonies of the capitalistic empires.' Scarano concludes from his study of Puerto Rico:

> The growth of the slave plantation complex was a logical result of the collapse of Spanish mercantilism and its replacement by a new colonial relationship in which foreign trade, imported capital and African slave labour played dominant roles. Unable to counteract the forces of change, Spain was compelled to abandon the prohibition on foreign trade and immigration it had enforced in its colonies since the conquest ... Inevitably, in the presence of objective conditions for change, the new policy permitted the incorporation of Puerto Rico into the international economy.

One effect of this development was the consolidation of the slave plantation complex whose future in the region looked bleak at the close of the Napoleonic war in 1815. Both Schnakenbourg and Dale W. Tomich have shown that by this time, and with the loss of St Domingue, a strong sense of the inevitable collapse of the French slave system pervaded the francophone imperial community. The overall Caribbean slave complex, however, found new sustenance in Cuba and Puerto Rico, providing further validation of the classical economic theories and assumptions that had underlain the enormous expansion of the previous century.[20]

The Cuban case, furthermore, has provided historians with an opportunity to test Smith's theory that technological modernization and industrialism were incompatible with slave relations of production, and that technology, more so than political ideology, drives out slavery from productive activities that survive on the basis of competitiveness and profit maximization. Moreno Fraginals, following Smith, developed an analysis of the rise of the Cuban sugar industry in which technological innovativeness is posed as the harbinger of wage labour. His three-volume work, *El ingenio* (1964), described the necessary role of slavery in the early stages of the sugar industry, and detailed the corrosive impact of technological and managerial advances on the labour system. The extensive use of steam power technology, new centrales and corporate organization after the 1820s, he argued, magnified the rigidities of slavery while promoting the greater congruence of various forms of wage labour. What was true of the sugar industry was also the case with other agricultural sectors in Cuba, Puerto Rico and the Dominican Republic, as noted by Scarano, Frank Moya Pons and Laird W. Bergad. Scientific approaches to plantation production and the employment of high technology in the factories undermined slavery and promoted the free labour market.[21]

Applying marginal theory, various authors expressed the idea that in principle slave labour is an inferior form of labour, and used it as the basis of an economic explanation of abolition which posits a supposed incompatibility of slavery with profit maximizing behaviour. Two manifestations of the economic inferiority of slave labour are offered: the requirement of an initial fixed capital investment in labour which does not take place in the case of free labour; and the high cost of coercion, expressed in complex control mechanisms. Historians, sceptical of the application of such economic theory, have emphasized the incorrectness of the historical narrative that results. They have drawn attention to the fact that outlays for slave purchase do not necessarily make slave labour economically inferior, any more than coercion costs make slave-based production necessarily wasteful. Also, they have indicated the ways in which slaves were responsive to positive stimuli and were

20 Francisco Scarano, 1984, p. xx; Christian Schnakenbourg, 1968; Dale W. Tomich, 1990c.

21 Manuel Moreno Fraginals, 1978 (1976); Frank Moya Pons, 1985, pp. 181–213; Francisco Scarano, 1984; Laird W. Bergad, 1983.

rewarded with money income, improved consumption, greater leisure time, access to upward occupational mobility, and manumission possibilities.

To some extent Moreno Fraginals' theory of slave emancipation in the Spanish colonies corresponds with that of Eric Williams for the British colonies. Both emphasized the impact of capitalist forces (within a free market culture) upon plantation economies in their mature (closed frontier) stage, and adopted the theory of economic growth as set out in classical economics. Critics of this thesis, such as Rebecca Scott, Seymour Drescher, and J. R. Ward, have shown the capacity of slavery to accommodate, at least in the short term, to technological advancement. While these arguments highlight the success of specific short-term adjustments by entrepreneurs at particular moments, they do not refute the basic correctness of historical interpretation that relies upon an application of classical theory.[22] William Green, in 1973, presented evidence from slaveowners' records to demonstrate their belief that the slaves themselves showed no interest in embracing labour-saving technology that would have ameliorated their social condition, but preferred to sabotage implementation as one way to undermine plantation profitability and derail the overall project of economic rationalization. On many Jamaican estates, Green argued, 'the substitution of the plough for manual labour proved both exasperating and uneconomical.' He cited M. G. Lewis, an innovative Jamaican proprietor of the early nineteenth century, who gave reasons for this state of affairs, saying 'the awkwardness, and still more obstinacy, of the few negroes, whose services were indispensable, was not to be overcome: they broke plough after plough, and ruined beast after beast, till the attempt was abandoned in despair.'[23] Altogether, then, the evidence suggests the need for refinement rather than abandonment of classical theory as an organizing framework in seeking explanations for emancipation that can accommodate the specifics of diverse Caribbean circumstances. For sure, the emancipation process requires an examination of variables other than the labour-technology relationship within development theory. Ultimately, however, the changing and uneven profitability of sugar and slavery in different parts of the Caribbean region was a fact, and the most important consideration in this regard was the general inability of the largest plantation segments to adjust slave relations to internationalized commodity markets.

Changes in the centres of high productivity and accumulation in the sugar plantation complex, furthermore, did not respect imperial boundaries. This fact enabled classical economists to promote the seemingly universalist nature of their theories and principles. Historians in general have not been

22 Rebecca J. Scott, 1984, 1985; Seymour Drescher, 1977, 1986; J. R. Ward, 1988.

23 William A. Green, 1973, pp. 450–1, 462–3.

critical of this claim, and in the study of developing colonial circumstances have presented an open field for testing its validation against the evidence of the slave plantation. Here, however, they have faced, but mostly ignored, a central issue, that of specifying the relationship between historical knowledge and economic theory. Historians have tended to use, for example, in a rather loose fashion, the economic theory of diminishing returns in order to explain trade diversification and shifts in the principal sites of profitable Caribbean sugar production. Simple scenarios are described in which production in a colony reaches a limit beyond which it could not expand, engendering a decline in profitability as that limit was approached. As profitability declines, and trade falls off, investors seek new places to invest their capital. In so doing they open up new frontiers, create new markets, and generate more trade.

Such a formulation constitutes a good example of the way in which historians have often misused economic theory; in this case what is also at issue is an application of the theory of rent. There are two ways in which misuse can be established: first, there is no reason to believe that the movement to new lands did generate higher yields and greater productivity; second, in most colonies there existed a phase of 'increasing rather than diminishing returns' when increased trade led to better management and organization so that the costs of trading and production were reduced, with a positive impact on profits. Historians have not always followed through the principles upon which economic theories are constructed, a result of their functioning at low levels of understanding and application. One significant result is that the so-called New Economic History has emerged as an analytical tendency driven by economists that seeks to cleverly demolish the traditional historian's methodology by demonstrating its inadequate and defective economic subtext.

In response to the criticism that their relish for historical facts as exact entities does not facilitate an interest in formalizing the theoretical object of their science, and that they have not engaged in a critical understanding of time as something more than a simple linear datum, Caribbean historians, unlike their counterparts working on the United States, have failed to develop an expansive historiography in which the specification of economic theory and the formal use of statistical methods are demonstrated. Few of them, however, would suggest that their work is innocent of economic theory in the way that was once the stated case. But the tendency has been for them to demonstrate that economic theory by itself has very little to say about the 'real' world, while generally agreeing that it facilitates an understanding of decision-making by calling attention to the nature of human behaviour.

At the lower end of generality, Caribbean historians have accepted the principles of the market – supply, demand, price, cost – and the alleged rationality of choice based on the assumption that people are close calculators. At the higher end, however, there has been considerable contention with respect to explaining the internal and external relations of plantations and entire colonies. Enormous debate, for example, has arisen when the plantation becomes subject to an application of the neoclassical theory of the firm, and when the movement of economic competitiveness from colony to colony is explained in terms of the classical theory of rent. The highly-contentious debate on the changing profitability of Caribbean slavery, for instance, has engaged historians for over fifty years.

Capitalism and slavery

Williams was explicit on a view, stated in general terms by Marx, that the profits obtained from the sugar-slave complex 'provided one of the main streams of the accumulation of capital in England which financed the Industrial Revolution.' Sheridan, in a number of essays, presented quantitative estimates of Jamaica's wealth in order to demonstrate the enormity of returns received by British investors in the sugar islands. Like Williams, Sheridan implied the effectiveness of a Keynesian multiplier effect whereby capital exports to England spiralled economic activity in several sectors of the British economy. Thomas critiqued both Sheridan and Williams, by using accounting and economic theory to demonstrate that when the balance sheet of incomes and expenditures for the 'Old Empire' is completed it shows the sugar colonies as net receivers rather than net exporters of capital, an argument which hardly denies the critical importance of the impact of Caribbean capital exports upon the British economy. Engerman argued similarly that profit levels generated by the slave trade and related activities were too small to have greatly affected British aggregate incomes and investments. Solow perceptively countered Engerman by drawing attention to the flawed application of economic theory. She argued that static measurements presented as ratios cannot capture the dynamic multiplier effect of capital inflows.[24]

Only in recent times, and as part of this debate, has the specification of economic theory been done as a matter of course. The slaveowner is now

24 Eric Williams, 1944, p. 52; Richard B. Sheridan, 1965, 1968, 1969; Robert Paul Thomas, 1968; Stanley L. Engerman, 1972; B. L. Solow, 1985, 1987.

assumed to be a 'pure' wealth maximizer when deciding what amount of labour to demand from his slaves. It is also assumed that all aspects of the master-slave relationship can be subjected to quantitative expression. This approach has enabled the historian to attempt the measurement of the efficiency of slave labour and slave plantation economies, in terms of total factor productivity, and to make comparisons with productive operations using free labour. Keith Aufhauser's seminal essay of 1974, 'Profitability of Slavery in the British Caribbean', demonstrates well the way in which historians now use economic theory. He sees the slave plantation as a firm whose business is measurable in terms of profitability. He borrows heavily, though critically, from the methodology developed by Alfred H. Conrad and John R. Meyer who in 1958 published a pathbreaking study on the economics of United States slavery.

Conrad and Meyer were explicit in their objective, which was to bring the precision of neoclassical capital theory to bear on the frequently-discussed historical problem of slave labour efficiency. They stated: 'Specifically, we shall attempt to measure the profitability of southern slave operations in terms of modern capital theory. In doing so, we shall illustrate the ways in which economic theory might be used in ordering and organising historical facts.' Aufhauser's approach was to compare the rate of return to a unit of slave capital with the interest rate prevailing in other sectors in order to comment on slavery's efficiency and profitability.[25] He began with a critique of Lowell J. Ragatz's pathbreaking study, *The Fall of the Planter Class in the British Caribbean, 1763–1833* (1928). Ragatz had ascribed the disintegration of the slave plantation system to an increase in sugar supplies from the lower-cost East Indies, and the exposure of high cost, traditionally protected, West Indian sugar producers, to freer international trade. The result, he argued, was their general inability to meet the competitive challenge of new market realities. The combined circumstances of decreasing world wholesale prices for sugar and increasing domestic production costs meant that English West Indian sugar planters could not withstand the political pressure on slavery as a socio-economic system. Abolition of the slave trade and the emancipation of slaves followed from this general decline in competitiveness.[26]

Aufhauser argued that while the production of sugar in the East Indies soared during the 1820s, output in the new West Indian colonies of Trinidad and Guiana did so at a higher rate. West Indian sugar, therefore, made the

25 R. Keith Aufhauser, 1974; Alfred H. Conrad and John R. Meyer, 1958; Philip Coelho, 1973; Richard Pares, 1937.

26 Lowell J. Ragatz, 1928; Selwyn H. Carrington, 1988b.

largest single contribution to the outward shift in the supply curve for sugar. He stated:

> It was the West Indians, supposedly unable to compete, who expanded production most rapidly during the period just previous to emancipation. One might suspect that the West Indian planters were making a common mistake; they might have been trying to compensate for low prices with a high volume of output. But a look at the relationship of price to production ... suggests that the plantation owners were reacting with a lag in an economically rational fashion.[27]

Ragatz, thought Aufhauser, was correct to link the shifting political fortunes of the West Indian economic élite to the rise of freer trade and the collapse of monopoly. This, however, he found to be an insufficient explanation. The next step, he said, required the use of capital theory to investigate the financial standing and viability of sugar plantations, and the ability of the industry to promote economic development.

Aufhauser's analysis is typically neoclassical. To measure the rate of return to slave capital requires the assumption of fixed proportions of all factors of production and constant returns of scale, that is, no difference between the marginal return to a unit of slave capital and the average return. Using Barbados estates for the data base, he concluded that a 4–7 per cent rate of return could be expected which compared favourably with the 5 per cent rate of return on bills of credit at the time. That is, Barbadian planters, the oldest producers in the region – operating on a small scale with exhausted soils – were making as high a return as could be obtained by lending their money. From 'a business point of view,' Aufhauser concluded, 'a slaveowner could match any employer of free labour on the score which they both respected – profits.'[28]

Williams' *Capitalism and Slavery*, first published in 1944, contains several theoretical economic arguments, but the one which has engaged historians most on both sides of the Atlantic relates to the slave economies' capital contribution to British industrialism. He contended that the British West Indian islands, having absorbed large quantities of foreign resources (European capital, European and African labour) in the formative stages, soon became self-financing, and emerged as net exporters of capital. This income, Williams noted, became the critical input into the British development process that spiralled the economy into a stage of self-sustained growth

27 R. Keith Aufhauser, 1974, p. 46.

28 R. Keith Aufhauser, 1974, p. 66; J. R. Ward, 1978.

through industrialism. Here, the Industrial Revolution is constructed as having its vital economic root buried deeply in the resources of the slave plantation complex. The theory is a compelling one. The slave system, in all its productive aspects, is said to have generated a surplus of capital in Britain that facilitated the development of trade, industry, entrepreneurial competence and confidence.

With respect to the relations between French economic development and colonial exploitation, C. L. R. James had articulated this thesis in his 1938 classic text, *The Black Jacobins*. The phenomenal economic expansion of St Domingue in the eighteenth century created the premier slave colony in the plantation complex. France, however, did not benefit to the same degree as England from its colonies. This circumstance has been explained in terms of the classical theory of economic growth that presupposes the existence of an expansionist bourgeois class, the alienation of workers into a wage proletariat, the freeing of capital from the grips of a pre-capitalist aristocracy, and the direct political representation of capitalism within the state. None of these social features existed at a sufficiently advanced level in eighteenth-century France. The collapse of French Caribbean slavery during the revolutionary era also signalled the reduction of French capitalism in the Atlantic market economy.[29]

Paradoxically, the Caribbean remained dependent during the nineteenth century on metropolitan reinvestments despite their generation of enormous capital surpluses in the previous two centuries. The appropriation of West Indian surpluses for metropolitan development was carefully constructed through a series of proprietary-assisted merchant companies, navigation laws, naval and military operations, and royal chartered monopoly organization. According to Lloyd Best, Williams' *Capitalism and Slavery* was a 'Monumental attempt to trace out significant linkages between the slave economy and the development of British capitalism without the aid of a systematic quantitative framework'.[30] The general principle Williams outlined, however, was consistent with the theory of economic growth of Smith. Williams stated: 'When British capitalism depended on the West Indies, they [the capitalists] ignored slavery or defended it. When British capitalism found the West Indian monopoly a nuisance, they destroyed West Indian slavery as the first step in the destruction of West Indian monopoly.' Furthermore, he argued, 'The attack falls in three phases: the attack on the slave trade, the attack on slavery, the attack on the preferential sugar duties. The slave trade

29 C. L. R. James, 1938; Dale W. Tomich, 1990c; Barbara L. Solow, 1985; Hilary McD. Beckles, 1987, pp. 302–16.
30 Lloyd Best, 1968, p. 305.

was abolished in 1807, slavery in 1833, and the sugar preference in 1846. These three events are inseparable.'[31] If Williams lacked the formal use of economic theory in articulating this thesis, his critics, on the other hand, have displayed considerable preparedness.

The broad thrust of Williams' thesis, however, is directly embedded in principles of classical, Marxist and Keynesian economic theory. Smith clearly understood the role of colonies as producers of surpluses for metropolitan consumption and investment. John Stuart Mill was quite explicit on the issue when he stated 'the West Indies was a convenient place for England to produce sugar' for the purposes of pleasure (consumption) and profit (industrial processing and trade).[32] Marx, too, commented on the wider context of the Atlantic relations of slavery and capitalism, and foretold, in his theory of capitalist economic development, the core narrative of what became the Williams thesis:

> Direct slavery is as much the pivot of our industrialism today as machinery, credit, etc .... Slavery has given value to the colonies; the colonies have created world trade; world trade is the necessary condition of large-scale machine industry. Thus, before the traffic in negroes began, the colonies supplied the Old World with only very few products and made no visible change in the face of the earth. Slavery is therefore an economic category of the highest importance.[33]

Williams made no direct reference to the work of Marx, and Smith was mentioned only within the context of a theoretical assault on mercantilist protectionist theory. The influence of Marxism, however, is discernible to the extent that many aspects of *Capitalism and Slavery* have been described as typical of crude economic determinism within the broad theoretical framework of historical materialism.

Williams argued that slavery has its origins, not in Euro-centric racist ideology, but in the specific circumstances of the development of a global market economy. His thesis that enslavement of African labour was a rational economic choice given the need to maximize profits under frontier conditions, has recently been described by Solow and Stanley Engerman as unoriginal but nonetheless reflective of 'his own blend of the mercantilists and early classical economists.'[34] Presumably, Marx is included in the latter cate-

31 Eric Williams, 1944, pp. 136, 169.
32 Cited in Richard Bernal, Mark Figueroa and Michael Witter, 1984, p. 11.
33 Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, 1965, pp. 40–1; Karl Marx, 1867–95, vol. 1 (1976), p. 925.
34 Barbara L. Solow and Stanley L. Engerman, 1987, p. 3.

gory, since it remains fashionable to attribute arguments that give primacy to the economic factor in complex causal analysis to this source. Solow and Engerman stated, furthermore, that the reintroduction of economic theory into the analysis of slavery during the 1960s and 1970s was considerably encouraged by the publication of *Capitalism and Slavery.* Williams' insistence, they claim, on treating slavery as a supply of labour, with certain productivity and costs, whose adoption was determined by consideration of profit-maximization, 'was prophetic and has remained indispensable.'[35]

Williams, furthermore, upheld classical theory in offering an economic interpretation of abolition and emancipation that sidelined the politics of philanthropic and humanitarian struggles. By linking legislated abolition to economic decline after the American Revolutionary War, Williams drew attention to the manner in which mature capitalism, as Marx had shown, seeks to free the worker from the old relations of clientship, bondage and servitude. Emancipation, furthermore, was in the sugar planters' economic interests because their profits were falling under the inefficient slave system. It constituted, Williams argued, an act of economic modernization designed to rationalize colonial economic relations and set the stage for the further development of capitalist organization. While it is not, strictly-speaking, a Marxist dialectical analysis, it conforms to the classical theory of economic development that centres the transforming socio-political effects of capital accumulation.[36]

The presentation of the mature slave economy as 'irrational' with respect to optimal resource use was based upon two important principles of economics implicit within the neoclassical theory of the firm: that the entrepreneur should allow the market to determine the quantity and nature of labour employed, and that profit maximization should be the superordinate motivation with respect to labour use. The slave system, Williams noted, was characterized by considerable internal rigidities with respect to labour use. The plantation was an enterprise characterized by production seasonality. Since the politics of slavery did not allow for 'unemployment' as an economic state the slaveowner was not free to dismiss labour and recall it in order to accommodate cycles in production schedules. The retention of excess labour, therefore, typified the mature slave plantation. The social nature of the relations of slavery had placed a set of constraints on the rationalization of the labour process, some of which largely ruled out the replacement of labour power with tools and machinery. Abolitionists understood

35 Barbara L. Solow and Stanley L. Engerman, 1987, p. 4.

36 Stanley L. Engerman, 1981; Lance David and Robert Huttenback, 1982; Patrick O'Brien, 1982; Ralph A. Austen and Woodruff Smith, 1990.

these arguments and drew upon classical economic theory in order to assert that wage labour was more efficient than slave labour, and that emancipation was a necessary step within the wider project of shedding the British Empire of irrational organizational systems and procedures.

The relative efficiency of wage labour over slave labour, however, did not mean that emancipationists were prepared to abandon coercion as a method of securing labour. Economic theory, they understood, was circumstantial if not ideological. Labour was necessary, and English (white) supremacy in the colonial context also had to be secured. Resort to the theory of rent enabled them to rationalize the continuation of coercion within the emancipation discourse. W. L. Burn in 1937 repeated the argument used on both sides of the Atlantic, that where land was readily available those freed from slavery would not willingly sell their labour to plantation owners. Consequently, means had to be found of forcing workers to sell their labour. Abolitionists like Lord Howick, Under Secretary of State for the Colonies, invoked these economic ideas in an official memorandum in 1832:

> The great problem to be solved in drawing up any plan for the emancipation of the slaves in our colonies, is to devise some mode of inducing them when relieved from the fear of the Driver and his whip, to undergo the regular and continuous labour which is indispensible in carrying on the production of sugar .... I think it would be great for the real happiness of the negroes themselves, if the facility of acquiring land could be so far restricted as to prevent them, on the abolition of slavery, from abandoning the habits of regular industry. Accordingly, it is to the imposition of a considerable tax upon land that I chiefly look for the means of enabling the planter to continue his business when emancipation shall have taken place.[37]

Politics and economics, then, went hand in glove in determining that enforced labour did not disappear with emancipation by ensuring the imposition of apprenticeship systems, contract labour, and the revival of indentureship. While historians of the emancipation process have keenly articulated the economic arguments of abolitionists, explicit formalization within classical economic theory, however, has not generally been the case.

In spite of persistent and penetrative criticisms of *Capitalism and Slavery* over the past four decades, the text has continued to exert an

37 W. L. Burn, 1937, p. 105; Lord Howick cited in Patrick Richardson, 1968, pp. 109–10.

overwhelming intellectual influence over historical scholarship in the Caribbean – particularly evident in the case of research on the history of political economy in the region. While the Williams 'blend' of mercantilist, classical, Marxist and Keynesian economic thought gave theoretical coherence and analytical attractiveness to the discourse on slavery, it also provided conceptual and empirical foundation for the West Indianization of development theory. *Capitalism and Slavery* created a forum for regional economic historians and economists to tease out a 'relevant economics' that adequately explained development phenomena. Most have embraced the broad framework of Williams' historical analysis and used it as a canon in the formalization of economic theory and development paradigms.

Theorizing the crisis of development

During the 1960s and early 1970s a body of economic theory, generally referred to among West Indian political economists as the 'Plantation Economy School', was formulated by a small group of radical economists at the University of the West Indies. Particularly prominent within this forum, which became known as the 'New World Group', were Lloyd Best, Norman Girvan, C. Y. Thomas and George Beckford. Their new and radical political economy had emerged partly from a critical appraisal of the perceived limited usefulness to the region of traditional Keynesian and neoclassical economic theory as presented by their internationally eminent colleague, W. Arthur Lewis. The early 1960s had brought new intellectual challenges to the region. The politics of Federation had forced the British territories to examine the viability of customs unions and related integrationist economic institutions, in addition to the common overall structural problems associated with economic underdevelopment.[38]

The radicals argued that Lewis' liberal development paradigm could not account fully for the causes of regional economic backwardness since it was not cast within an historical understanding of the regime. Furthermore, the radicals were politically sensitive to, and supportive of, the nationalist anti-colonial movements, and needed an account of historical reality that identified and specified the forces of colonial domination and exploitation. During the early 1980s a younger generation of Jamaican economists, while evaluating the significance of these criticisms, noted that the radical thinkers, unlike Lewis, identified ideologically as 'intellectual workers' with the historical struggles of the Caribbean people – the Maroon wars, the rebellion against slavery, the revolts of the 1930s, and the nationalist movements which emerged thereafter. *Capitalism and Slavery* was conceived as providing the necessary historical ammunition for the development of an indigenous political economy. Beckford noted that they were determined from the outset to fashion the tools of economics to the new needs of the Caribbean environment. Hence an intensive search was launched for a relevant economics based upon, and always sensitive to, historical forces.[39]

The objective of the Plantation Economy School was to present an interpretation of Caribbean economy and society so as to facilitate structural change. Beckford noted that Williams' focus upon the plantation system and its historical legacy set the stage for the subsequent formalization of a general theory of Caribbean economy. He began the analysis of underdevelopment in the Caribbean with a statement which is clearly a conceptual extraction from Williams:

> Modern Caribbean economic history begins with the slave plantation. European capital and management, combined with African slave labour, provided the basis for utilizing the fertile lands of the region to produce agricultural raw materials for trans-shipment to Europe. Caribbean economy during that era was totally dependent on Europe (and Africa), and underdevelopment was at a peak during that era of total dependency ... The raw sugar from each plantation was then consigned to metropolitan merchant bankers for sale in the metropole. Supplies of capital goods for plantation use came back from the metropole to supplement stock which the plantation could build from its own resources.[40]

Beckford's conception of the Caribbean economy was followed by a detailed account of the unequal exchange relationship that characterized colonial-metropolitan trade, and here the Williams influence is pervasive. Not only did Beckford show, following Williams, how the terms of trade consistently favoured the metropolis, hence the accumulation of the surplus there, but he also illustrated the negative socio-economic impact upon the colonial structures. This was critical to his understanding of the problems of dependency and underdevelopment.

A more specific manipulation of *Capitalism and Slavery* can be found in Best's model of 'Pure Plantation Economy', an attempt to identify the

38 Bent Hanson, 1979; Dennis Benn, 1974, pp. 249–60; George L. Beckford, 1984; C. Y. Thomas, 1968.

39 George L. Beckford, 1984; W. Arthur Lewis, 1945, 1954, 1970.
40 George L. Beckford, 1975, p. 80.

forces generating capitalist underdevelopment in the region. Best, like his colleagues, accepted Williams' view that the plantation economy of the region was capitalist by inception, structure and function. The objective nature of the region's economy, therefore, was not one of undevelopment, but capitalist underdevelopment. Williams had shown how economic activity in the plantation complex was structurally geared toward the satisfaction of mercantile interests – hence the characteristic foreign trade bias and metropolitan-market determinism within the region. Best therefore reformulated Williams' argument and designated the islands as 'export-propelled economies' – subtypes of the wider North Atlantic capitalist mode of production. In order not to be accused of vulgar structural reductionism or economism, as Williams has been by his critics, plantation theorists borrowed heavily from Caribbean historiography and constructed the corresponding superstructures of plantation economies.

Best's attempt to present a typology of the West Indian economy within an historical framework was theoretically pathbreaking. He noted, in line with A. Gunder Frank and the 'dependency school', that his analysis rested upon the view that economic theory in the underdeveloped regions can profit only by relaxing its unwitting preoccupation with the special cases of European countries and by proceeding to a typology of structures, each having characteristic laws of motion. Plantation economy, the type selected, Best noted, falls within the general class of hinterland or periphery externally propelled sub-economies. *Capitalism and Slavery*, then, constituted a critical contribution to 'world-systems' development theory in that it suggests the marginalization (for further future exploitation) of technologically backward colonized economies by 'core' industrializing economies within the context of a globalized capitalist market system.[41]

Within the typology presented by Best, the following central features of the mature slave economy were identified: 1) muscovado bias, 2) monopolistic metropolitan exchange mechanism, 3) navigation laws and exclusive trading, and 4) imperial preference. He made references to the important work of Ragatz and Pares, but his model is based largely upon the cyclical movement of the British West Indian plantation economy between 1650 and 1838, as presented by Williams. Best noted that 'The cycle can be divided into a foundation period, a golden age, and a period of maturity and decline. Maturity and decline tends to be a chronic condition, terminated by the total collapse of the system.'[42] By the end of the eighteenth century the metropolitan economy was undergoing far-reaching change. Merchant enterprise had been reorganizing industry, activating agriculture, and transforming the economy. Increasing commodity production, both in the hinterland and in the metropolis, reduced the scarcity value of imperial luxuries. In the course of time, the expansion of production and the extension of the market eroded mercantile profits, and with that, mercantile influence. Capital shifted from trade to production. The exclusivist structure erected to protect the profitability of mercantile economy was seen in rising industrial interest as a brake on further expansion. This he describes as the 'Williams Effect'.[43] It is clearly a restatement of the 'decline thesis', which was first conceptualized by Ragatz.

41 A. Gunder Frank, 1966, 1978, p. 15; Elizabeth Fox-Genovese and Eugene D. Genovese, 1983; Immanuel Wallerstein, 1974–80, 1979.

42 Kari Levitt and Lloyd Best, 1975, p. 44.

The *Capitalism and Slavery* debate, and more specifically the emancipation discourse, also paid some attention to theories of the economy based on class struggle over distribution. Slaves were integrated into the larger colonial economies as autonomous producers on subsistence plots allocated by plantations. Others engaged in marketing activities by which they accumulated petty capital on their own account. Marginalized whites – peasants and workers – also functioned on the periphery of the plantation sector. The general tendency has been for historians to perceive the dual-economy feature as complementary rather than contradictory to the slaveowner's agenda. The subsistence sector, it is argued, assisted the plantation sector in that it reduced some labour costs, minimized the social and economic impact of the cyclical nature of the sugar industry, and contributed to social stability. Important economic reconceptions of this relationship have emerged in recent times. The non-plantation sector is presented as a rival for economic resources and a potential conduit for greater economic development. The debate on the nature of this relationship in all Caribbean post-slavery dispensations, particularly in the Spanish and English colonies, relies upon clearly-articulated theories of economic growth – both classical and Marxist.

In the classical school, the peasant sector is considered backward, inefficient in resource use, and disconnected from the capitalist economy. Furthermore, it is understood to be lacking in managerial know-how, not committed to surplus accumulation for reinvestment, and possessive of a cultural tendency towards subsistence and market irrationality. Michael Craton has argued that 'ex-slaves and their descendants' were regarded as 'totally non-productive', and those 'in the peasant sector were steadily degraded into part-time labourers' in accordance with the 'dependence of the economy on external and worldwide forces.' At the macro level, he noted, there was a capitalist intensification of the post-slavery economy, deepening its global dependence and creating 'new forms' of labour exploitation. At the micro

43 Lloyd Best, 1968, p. 291.

level, 'optimising managers were able to trim and shape their workforces to suit the needs of crop and factory.' Craton submits, furthermore, that 'the transition from slavery to free wage labour was inevitably associated with a general galvanization of the dialectic between capital and labour.'[44]

Nigel Bolland's recent work on the restructuring of capital-labour relations in post-slavery Belize has conceptual coherence on account of its association with both neoclassical and Marxist theories of economic growth. Notions of class conflict, and the assumption that capital secures for itself the greater share of surpluses, are not only indicative of his acceptance of nineteenth-century economic categories and theories, but constitute the basis for his articulation of a politics of contest designed to refashion economic resource ownership and use.[45] Other Marxist historians, particularly Walter Rodney and Richard Hart, have critiqued the post-slavery planter élite as surviving in a culture protective of narrow political and ideological interests, and rooted in notions of race supremacy.

In this model, the imperial centre, including the still active anti-slavery groups, supports the plantocracy. While recognizing its semi-slavery exploitation of labour, and its structural inability to generate self-sustained growth for socio-economic transformation and modernization, the metropole backs this class in its contest with other groups over access to productive resources. By distorting the efficient use of productive resources the plantation sector is considered the disequilibrating force which keeps the colonial economy backward and out of pace with the developing nationalist agenda of the social majority whose political progressiveness and independence is rooted in the village peasantries and urban tenantries. Rodney's *History of the Guyanese Working People 1881–1905* (1981), for example, detailed the struggle of the non-élite agrarian sector to free itself from the political and economic constraints of the hegemonic plantation sector. The reconstituted peasantry and small farmers are described as the dynamic economic and political sector in post-slavery societies, and their political suppression and economic strangulation are offered as explanations for underdevelopment and persistent economic backwardness. Here, the plantation sector's attempts to modernize its operations by adopting corporate organizational forms and investing in mechanization are seen as last resort responses to market forces in order to meet the political objective of maintaining the disenfranchisement and marginalization of challengers from below. Logically, it is claimed that only a radical, if not revolutionary, restructuring of the plantation system,

44 Michael Craton, 1992, pp. 59–61; Stanley L. Engerman, 1984.
45 O. Nigel Bolland, 1981.

could constitute a prerequisite for self-sustained economic development in the region.[46]

Conclusion

Various aspects of the development discourse, then, from the early colonial period to the present, have shaped the context within which historians of the Caribbean have engaged the principles and postulates of economic theory. The intensity of the engagement reflects both the perceived conceptual tensions between the disciplines of history and economics as well as a general unwillingness in both camps to explicitly state the precise areas of mutual dependence and interdependence. This tradition has given way to some extent in recent times under the pressure of interdisciplinary academic approaches that have had considerable success with research and writing methods that demand specification. While this academic development has shown the extent to which Caribbean historians have been borrowers of European economic theory, it has also demonstrated the ways that economics, as a discipline, has been shaped by Caribbean historical moments, movements and mentalities.

The historical work of mercantilist pamphleteers, colonial travellers and social commentators on the Caribbean impacted upon the thinking of classical economists, Smith in particular. In turn, economic theory presented historians with analytical tools and assumptions that shaped their judgements and interpretations. This dialectical interaction has been demonstrated with respect to the influence of mercantilist and classical economics on the *Capitalism and Slavery* debate, as well as on radical Caribbean departures in development theory. In this regard, history and economics have been 'sleeping partners' in the project of constructing representations and interpretations of the Caribbean.

The relationship, furthermore, has been a fruitful one. The process of discerning the internal logic of the Caribbean formation, and identifying the features of external environments within which transformation takes place, have essentially been the result of a major interdisciplinary effort. The region's centrality to Western modernity discourse has promoted this approach, so has the tension resulting from the encounter between autochthonous and imperial cultures, and between old world mentalities and expectations of the 'new' space. The striking imagery of the materialist project, moreover, has tended to assume hegemonic status in the historical

46 Richard Hart, 1973; Walter Rodney, 1981.

construction of the region, an interpretive perspective that has privileged the 'economic' within historical paradigms. To some extent this has been unavoidable given the materialist nature of modernity discourse. Perhaps the time has now come for historians to widen their vistas by responding to the challenges thrown out by post-modernist literary criticism (that problematizes historical texts by calling attention to their fictional nature) in much the same way that they engaged the literatures and epistemologies of the Enlightenment.

Gender in Caribbean history

Jean Stubbs

A new spirit of reclamation permeated late twentieth-century Caribbean historiography, with gender emerging not only as a theme but as a conceptual perspective that called for a substantial rewriting of the region's history. The context, both regional and international, was a process beginning in the 1960s, whereby scholarly discourse placed under scrutiny first women and then gender, including gender relations, men and masculinity. This process, from women's or feminist history to gender history, was cross-fertilized by other disciplines closely linked to history, such as development studies, cultural studies, anthropology, sociology and archaeology. The result was a significant engendering of Caribbean history and historiography.

By contrast, a gender analysis of who the Caribbean historians have been over time, what they chose to write about and how they went about it, runs the risk of being an essentially negative exercise. For centuries they were overwhelmingly male historians for whom women were largely 'invisible'. A cursory glance at even some of the region's more interpretative recent scholarship evidences the continuing divorce between a predominantly male-authored 'gender-blind' or 'gender-biased', grandiose-sweep, mainstream political, economic and social history and that which is expressly 'gender-sensitized' and largely, though by no means exclusively, authored by women.

What follows does not attempt to be exhaustive and critical of the former but rather selective of the latter. It sets out to be constructive and suggest ways in which scholarship has contributed to an engendering of Caribbean history. By concentrating on late twentieth-century work, it does not wish to suggest that nothing of substance was achieved before that time. Just as modern-day women's movements and feminism cannot be understood without reference to prior waves of activism and theorizing on women's condition, dating back centuries, so also a gendered approach to Caribbean history needs to be cognizant of what went before, much of which continues to be discovered and re-discovered.

Not all the scholars under consideration are historians by craft, but their work is either historical in nature or has clear implications for historical