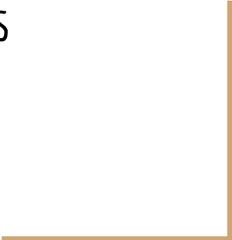




Enslaved Life (Part One)

Week Five Lectures



Reminder:

- From the early-1500s, when the Caribbean Islands began to be permanently settled by Europeans, Europe fundamentally depended on slavery.
 - Over the course of these centuries, the intensity of sugar, cotton, tobacco, and other commodities grew, as did the importance of slave labour.
- We must remember that the first slaves were local Native American people, many of whom died of disease quickly.
 - Remember the difference between disease and plague
- Only once the 1600s started did large numbers of African slaves begin to come to these Islands and Brazil.
 - Remember that the first permanent settlements (by English people) in North America did not happen until 1607 (Virginia)
 - North America was not the center of the world of Slavery until the 1800s; the Caribbean and Brazil were.

Brazil (From Curtin Ch. 4)

- Remember that before the 1570s, the primary colony for Sugar production was Sao Tome, off the West African coast near Angola.
- Originally, the Portuguese used ports in Brazil to trade with local Native Americans for wood products, particularly dye woods (Paubrasilia), producing a red dye for fabrics and textiles. This was a barter trade system.
- By the mid-1500s, the Portuguese began setting up sugar plantations in Brazil and enslaving the local population.
 - Diseases caused the local population to die off very quickly, speeding up the transfer of Slaves from Africa to Brazil.
- The Portuguese already had a system of enslavement and exploitation of slave labour present on Sao Tome, they merely transferred this to Brazil.
 - They realized that Brazil would become even better for sugar than Sao Tome

Caribbean Sugar (from Curtin Ch. 6)

- According to Curtin, "Each time the [plantation] complex moved to a new place, it had brought on a sugar revolution. The onward movement from Madeira to Brazil was a sugar Revolution; the forward movement from the eastern Caribbean to Saint Domingue [Haiti] was another; and others still lay in the future for Cuba, Mauritius, Natal, Peru, Hawaii, and Fiji, among others" (73).
 - This 'revolution' means new technologies of production, transformation, shipping, and labour control were used, making each 'revolution' more profitable.
- Because there was not yet a developed railroad system anywhere in the world at this time (pre-1750s), all of the best land for sugar cultivation was near the coast of these islands. After all, it is hard to get sugar from the mountains to boats without railroad or automobile transport.
- Curtin notes (as did Sidney Mintz) that sugar has a high "price elasticity of demand". This means that as the price decreases, gross consumption is likely to increase in response, keeping profits high.

Slave Societies within the Plantation Complex

- Remember that slaves were primarily brought to the New World to work plantations, replacing those Native American slaves who were killed by disease.
 - It was not until the 1840s that there were more whites than black people in the New World.
- Most slaves worked on plantations, but many others worked on Peruvian gold mines (and Brazilian ones, albeit very limited).
- Many slaves sought to escape from their conditions of servitude. Many ran away into inhospitable regions and did their best to recreate African communities in the Americas. These became known as "maroon" colonies.
 - The most successful were in Suriname, Brazil, and some parts of Louisiana.
 - Many are still in existence today, especially Suriname, where they actually led a recent civil war against the mixed-heritage government.
- Finally, according to Gomez, "The concept of race, the notion that human beings can be clearly differentiated into basic, hierarchically arranged categories based upon certain combinations of shared physical characteristics, developed in tandem with slavery" (90).
 - We will discuss this in-depth next week.