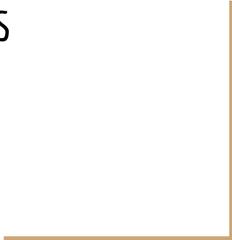




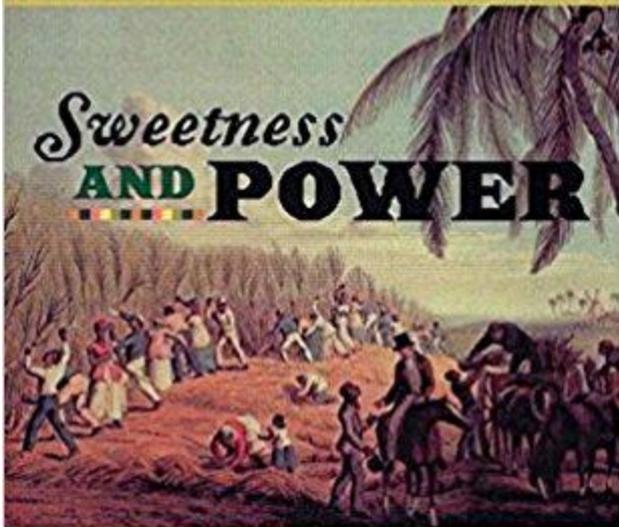
Conceptualising the
Atlantic World and the
Atlantic “Plantation
Complex”

Week One Lectures



"This measured, intelligent, ambitious book has something for everybody... Mintz opens a whole series of doors onto rich and unsuspected worlds."
— J. H. Elliott, *The New York Review of Books*

Sweetness AND POWER



The Place of Sugar in Modern History



Sidney W. Mintz

The RISE AND FALL of the PLANTATION COMPLEX

Second Edition



Essays in Atlantic History
PHILIP D. CURTIN

Sugar Consumption in Britain (per capita, per year)

- 1704 - 4 lbs (1.8 kg)
- 1800 - 18 lbs (8.1kg)
- 1900 - 90 lbs (40.8 kg)

THIS IS PROFOUNDLY STRANGE!!!

Saccharum officinarum (Sugarcane)





Sugarcane crops require lots of heat and rain

- It needs sub-tropical or tropical conditions, with large amounts of water.
- Though it can thrive without irrigation, it flourishes best (and produces more sucrose, which it is watered regularly and its temperature remains stable.

Sugar harvesting is labour intensive

"The cane is chopped, then ground, pressed, pounded, or soaked in liquid. Heating the liquid containing the sucrose causes evaporation and a resulting sucrose concentration. As the liquid becomes supersaturated, crystals begin to appear. In effect, crystallization requires the concentration of a supersaturated solution in which sucrose is contained in liquid form."

[Mintz p. 21]

While molasses and brown sugar are also refined from sugarcane, they are less "pure" than ground white sugar, which is approximately 99 percent pure.

Curtin [p. 4] states that prior to modern machinery, sugarcane needed one worker per cultivated acre [0.4ha] per year.

BUT! Sugar is very valuable

- Once processed, sugar rarely rots or diminishes in value or taste.
- Because so much labour and cane plants go into producing one bag of sugar, for many years it had a very high value/weight ratio
- This made it worthwhile to grow sugar far away from where it is consumed. This is crucial!!!



Sugar in the Mediterranean

- Sugar was originally cultivated in places like Iran and Palestine. In time, it made its way to Cyprus and Egypt. After the Crusades of the Eleventh and Twelfth Centuries, many of these lands came under European occupation.
- While slavery existed in the Mediterranean for hundreds and hundreds of years, the vast majority of agricultural labour was not undertaken by slaves. Sugar plantations began to change this, both in Europe and beyond. At this point (1200s), most slaves came from Eastern Europe and Asia. Over the course of the next few hundred years, plantation economies would develop, shaping agriculture forever.

What is Curtin's "Plantation Complex"?

1. "Most of the productive labour was forced labour, [and] most people were slaves."
2. "The population was not self-sustaining." There was a high death rate compared to live births.
3. "Agricultural enterprise was organized in large-scale capitalist plantations."
4. "Though capitalist, the plantations also had certain features that can be called feudal."
5. "The plantations were created to supply a distant market with a highly specialized product."
6. "Political Control over the system lay on another continent and in another kind of society."

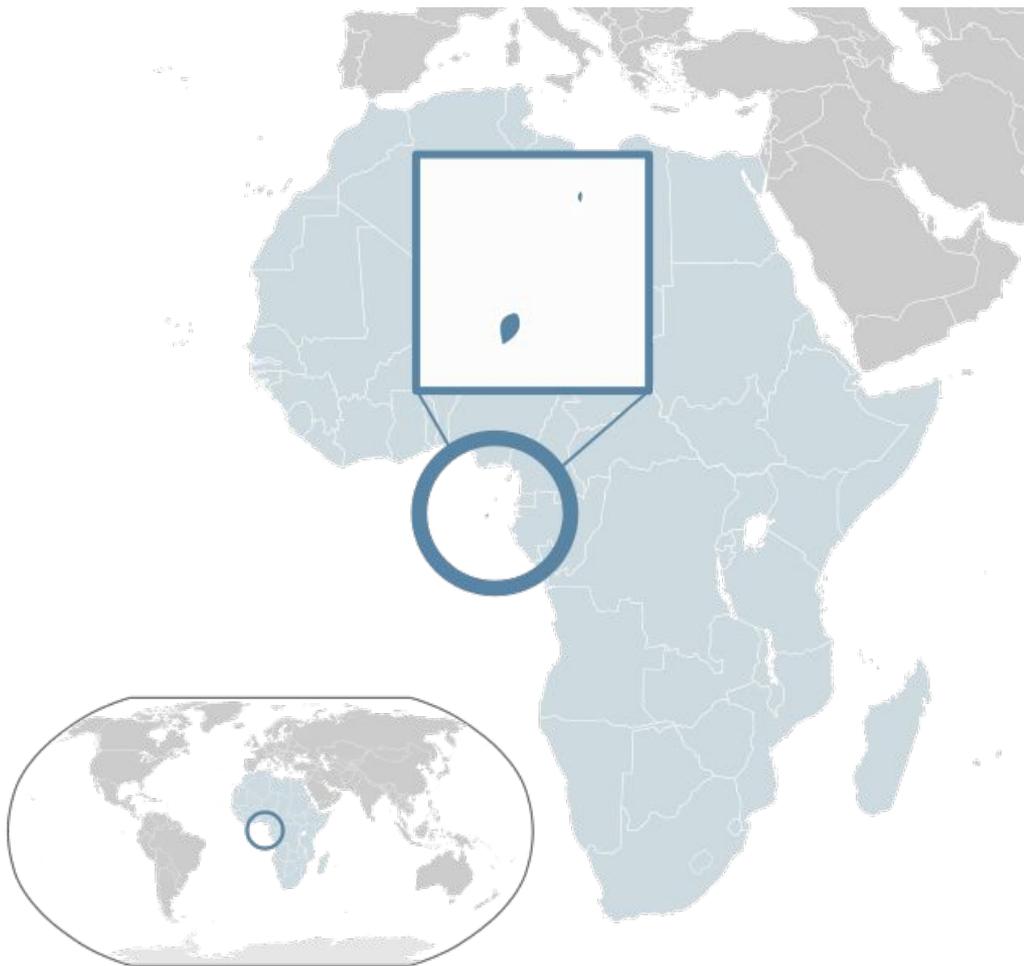
The Plantation Complex as a "Cultural Encounter"

Curtin [p. 14-15] notes that there are many ways trade, exploration, and production can lead to cultural encounters, from the most peaceful to the most vicious.

The "Plantation Complex" was a specific type of meeting of different peoples, by which "Europeans conquered and then replaced the vanishing native peoples with settlers - but not settlers from Europe. At first, these settlers were drawn mainly from Africa, but later they came from Asian lands as well."

This "Plantation Complex" was most prominent in the Caribbean, South-Eastern United States, and Parts of Brazil, as well as the Atlantic Islands.

Exploration opens up new locations for Sugar Production.

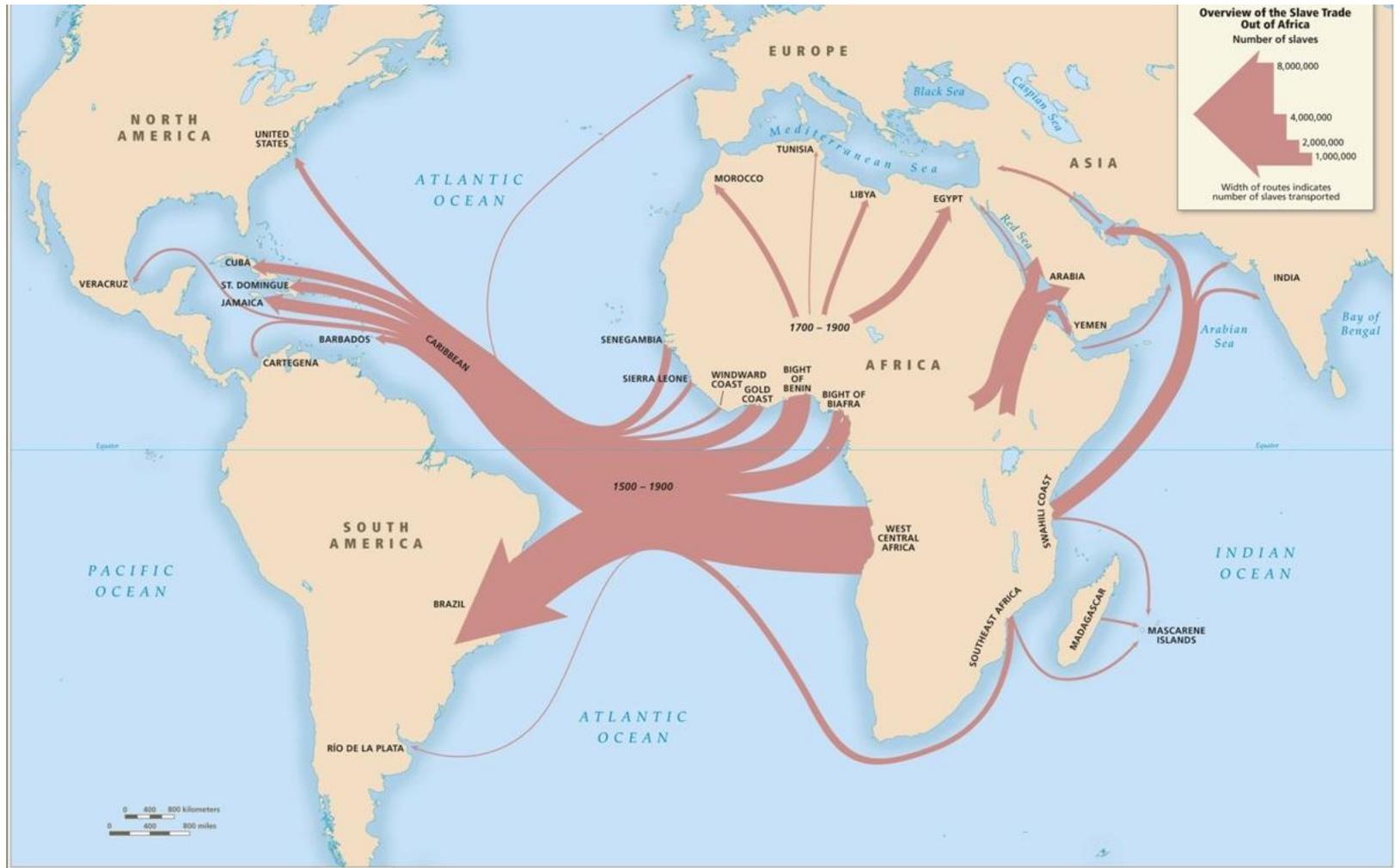


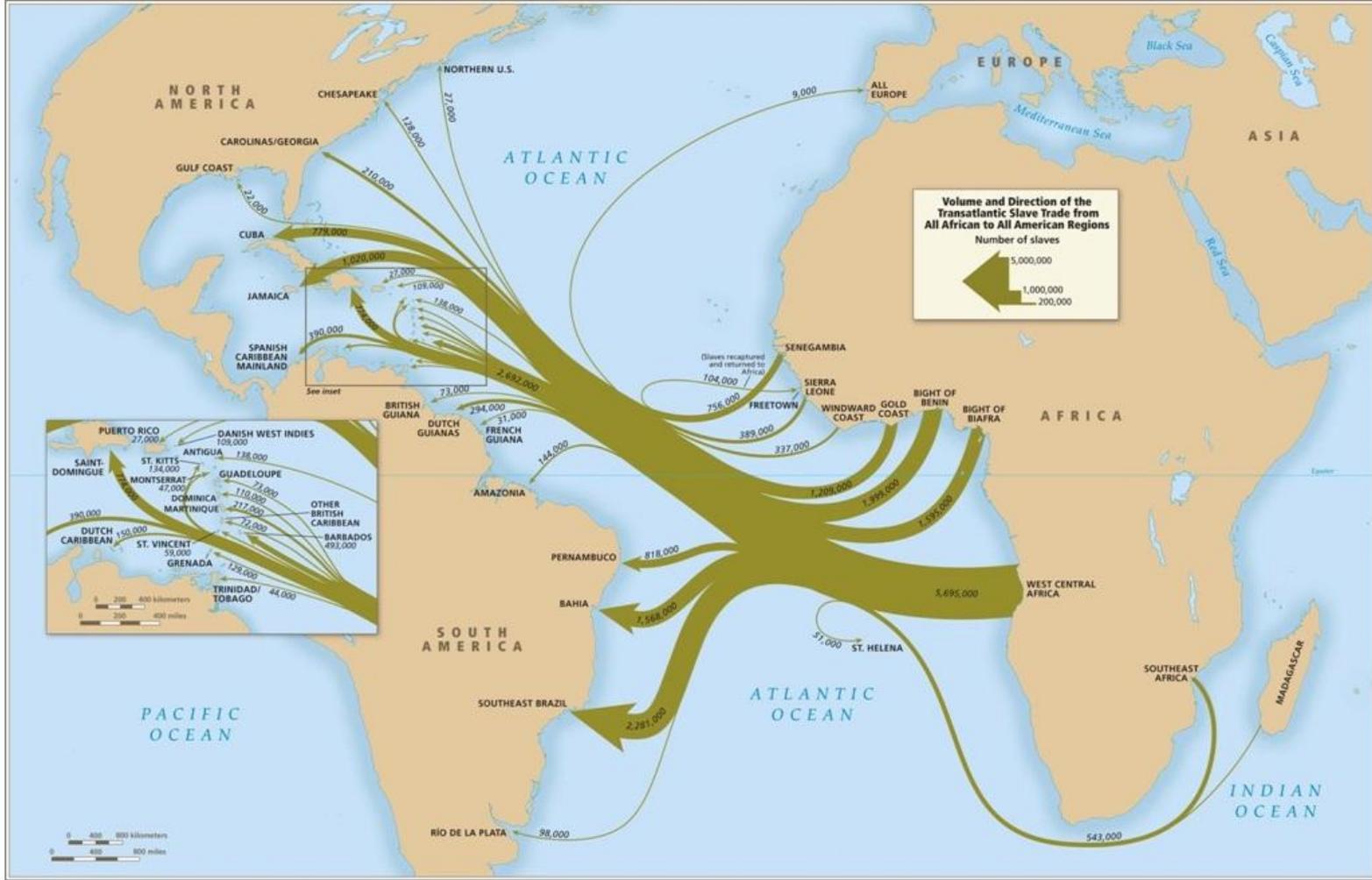
The Canary Islands and São Tomé & Príncipe

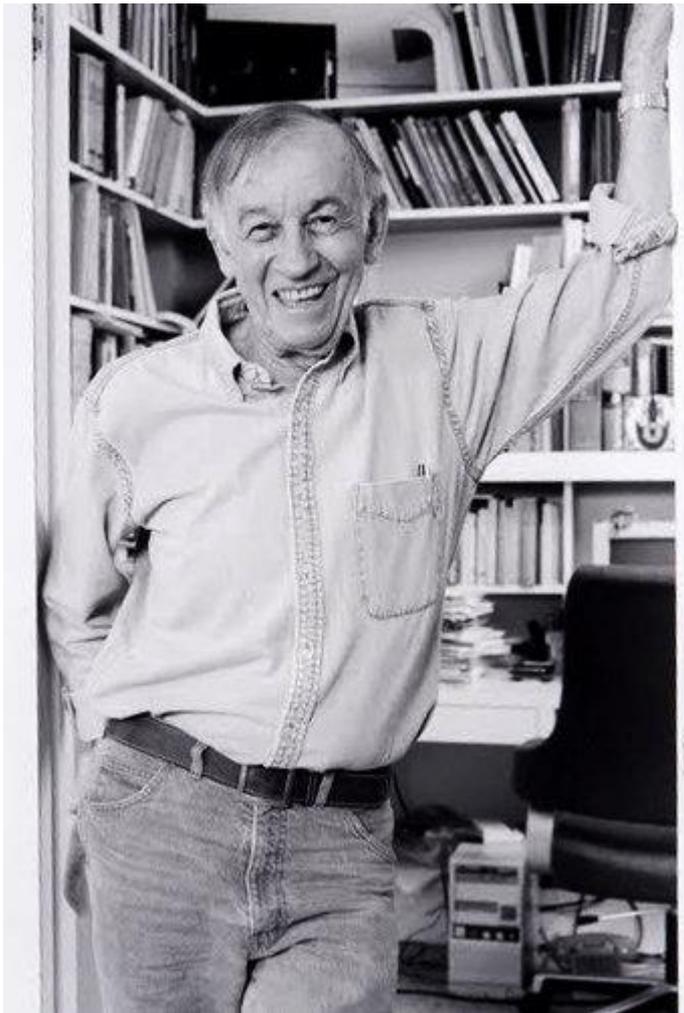
- Most of the Canary Islanders (off the Coast of Morocco), were killed off quickly by European diseases. These islands practiced sugar production (though in more modest quantity than the Americas) after they were settled by the Portuguese (and later the Spanish) in the 1300s. The islands also served as a way-station between Europe, Africa, and the Americas.
- São Tomé and Príncipe was more crucial. In Curtin's words, "Here was an island off the coast of Africa far from Europe, but it had the advantages of a tropical climate, rich volcanic soils, and nearby sources of labour from the Kingdoms of Kongo and Benin. São Tomé was the first place in the Atlantic World where sugar plantation workers were mainly slaves and, in this case, slaves from Africa." [p. 24]

Movement to the Americas

- While exploration and colonization in the Americas after 1492 was not very much influenced by Sugar, the efforts in São Tomé taught the Spanish, Portuguese, English, Dutch, and French that sugar production far from the site of consumption was not just possible, but profitable.
- The Caribbean islands, most of which were at least partially settled by the mid 1500s, had a large native population, though diseases decimated the populations quite quickly, and they proved to be an unreliable labour force to transport the "plantation complex" to the new world. Therefore, as was done in São Tomé, African slaves were sought out. We will explore this further from Week Three.







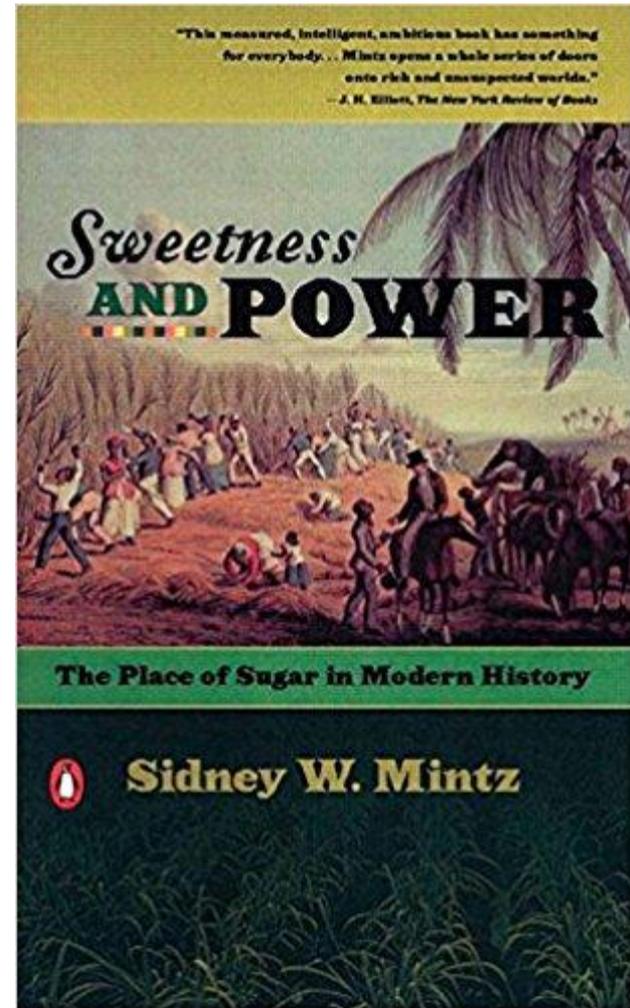
Sidney Mintz, 1922-2015

PhD in Anthropology from
Columbia University, 1951

Professor of Anthropology,
Yale & Johns Hopkins
Universities.

Conducted Anthropological
Fieldwork among Sugar Cane
workers in Haiti, Puerto Rico,
and Jamaica (1948-1961).

Spent many years researching
and teaching the Anthropology
and History of Food
Consumption and Production,
and how it has shaped our
modern world.



Sugar Consumption in Britain (per capita, per year)

- 1704 - 4 lbs (1.8 kg)
- 1800 - 18 lbs (8.1kg)
- 1900 - 90 lbs (40.8 kg)

By 1900, Sugar was supplying one-fifth of the calories of the english Diet.

THIS IS PROFOUNDLY STRANGE!!!

Once, sugar was only for the rich, by the 1800s, sugar was a major component of poor people's diets.

The fact that humans have a natural desire and appreciation for sweetness (at least to a certain extent) does not fully explain why sugar has become so widespread and affordable.

“The question becomes not only how the English people became sugar eaters, but also what this meant for the subsequent transformation of their society.”

[Mintz, 14]



Search Google Maps



United States



Mexico



Satellite



North Atlantic Ocean



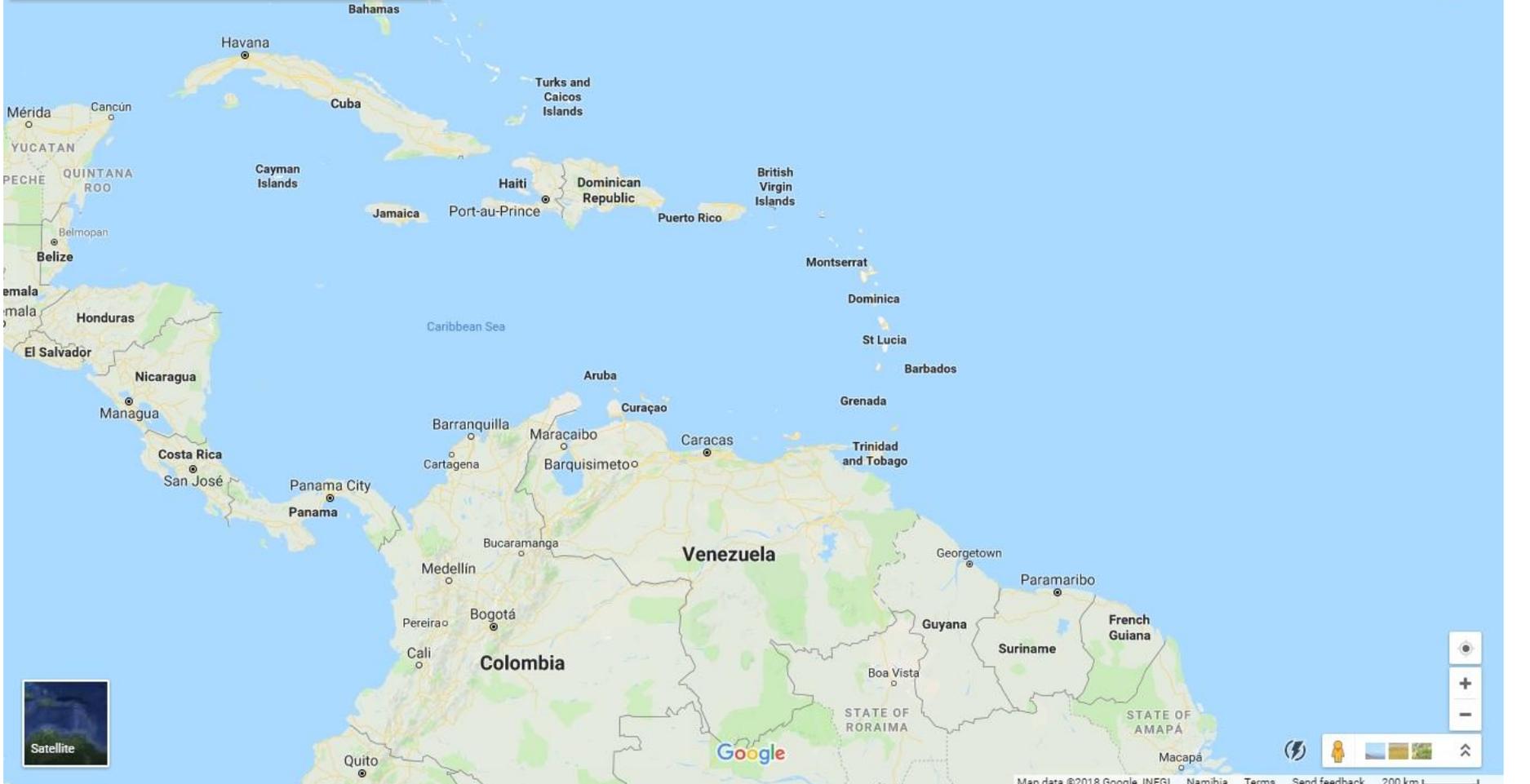


Search Google Maps



1

B



Satellite



Differing European Goals in the Caribbean

- The Spanish, while engaging in some Sugar production early on when they controlled Jamaica and other islands, primarily focused on mineral production and mining of precious metals (gold). This is why Peru, Mexico and Colombia were so important to their colonies.
 - Sugar production in Cuba became very important, but not until the 1800s, the same with the Dominican Republic.
- Brazil (especially Bahia and the N.E.) were initially the most successful for sugar production.
- The English, French, and Dutch were very important as well (with the English growing in importance).
- Foreign investment in Plantations (Dutch, Danish, German, Swedish)



Plantations as Industrial Agriculture

- Highly stratified and Disciplined Labour Force
- Production of commodities for export (not just for the ruling classes)
- Synthesis of Field and Factory
 - Processing done on site

- Indentured Labourer vs. Slave
- Slave vs. Proletarian

At this time the labour system in England was moving to a more "Free Labour" system; simultaneously the labour in its colonies was becoming more coercive.

Plantations: Connected to the Metropole

Plantations were not merely feudal institutions operating far from "the real economy": Capitalism. They were intricately linked to these metropole economies in Europe.

We ordinarily think of slavery and feudalism as separate from capitalism and capitalist development, as though slavery is a more "ancient" or "backward" way of producing. In reality, and the Caribbean shows this, capitalism in the metropole depended upon, and was greatly influenced by slave production.

Caribbean Plantation Connections

1. Plantations were sites of overseas investment, leading to profits in the European metropole.
2. Plantations were a market for the sale of finished products manufactured in the metropole
 - a. As was Africa, where plantation slaves were obtained.
3. Plantations economies set the stage for further overseas imperialism and settler colonialism. (Especially in the USA)
4. Caribbean Plantations produced goods which were consumed in the metropole (IMPORTANT!!!) and in Africa

"In fact, the veiled slavery of the wage labourers in Europe needed the unqualified slavery of the New World as its Pedestal" (Marx 1867: 925)

Plantation products in Europe

As sugar (under slave production) expanded in the Caribbean, prices of sugar decreased in Europe, and sugar moved from being a product for the extremely wealthy to a product consumed by most workers (in vast quantities). Before 1750, sugar was for the rich; after 1850, it was for the poor.

This was not just meeting a "taste" demand, but also a **caloric** demand.

Sugar is a preservative, making it possible to can and jar fruits, making products like jellies and marmalade. It also was used heavily in coffee and tea. Sugar was supplying 1/5 of the caloric content of British working people.



Dietary and Social Transformations

"Sweetened preserves, which could be left standing indefinitely without spoiling and without refrigeration, which were cheap and appealing to children, and which tasted better than more costly butter with store-purchased bread, outstripped or replaced porridge, much as tea had replaced milk and home-brewed beer. In practice, the convenience foods freed the wage-earning wife from one or even two meal preparations per day, meanwhile providing large numbers of calories to all of her family. Hot tea often replaced hot meals for children off the job, as well as for adults on the job" (Mintz, 130).

"The profound changes in dietary and consumption patterns in 18th & 19th century Europe were not random or fortuitous, but the direct consequences of the same momentum that created a world economy, shaping asymmetrical relationships between the metropolitan centres and their colonies and satellites, and the tremendous productive and distributive apparatuses, both technical and human, of modern capitalism" (Mintz, 158).

"The history of sugar suggests strongly that the availability, and also the circumstances of availability, of sucrose - which became one of the most desired of all edible commodities in the empire - were determined by forces outside the reach of the English masses themselves" (Mintz, 166).

Sugar and Wage Labour

"As the first exotic luxury transformed into a proletarian necessity, sugar was among the first imports to take on a new and different political and military importance to the broadening capitalist classes in the metropolis - different, that is, from gold, ivory, silk, and other durable luxuries. Whereas the plantations were long viewed as sources of profit through direct capital transfers for reinvestment *at* home, or through the absorption of finished goods *from* home, the hypothesis offered here is that sugar and other drug foods, but provisioning, satiating - and indeed, drugging - farm and factory workers, sharply reduced the overall cost of creating and reproducing the metropolitan proletariat" (Mintz, 180).

Sugar, Capitalism, Slavery

By focusing on both production and consumption, Mintz's *Sweetness and Power* eloquently shows that when we think about capitalism or slavery, they may very well be linked.

This book also shows that events in Europe, Africa, and the Caribbean (the "Atlantic World") operated as a totalizing whole, not as separate geographical locations.