

Dale W. Tomich. *Slavery in the Circuit of Sugar: Martinique and the World-Economy, 1830-1848*. Reprint edition. Albany: State University of New York Press, 2016. 507 pp. \$100.00, cloth, ISBN 978-1-4384-5917-2.

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Reissued as part of the Fernand Braudel Center Studies in Historical Social Science, of which Dale Tomich is the deputy director, *Slavery in the Circuit of Sugar* (initially published in 1990) has come to represent the standard text on the institution of forced labor in Martinique during the nineteenth century and one of the more important analyses of sugar-based slavery in general. Perhaps because of its place within the literature, Tomich has not included any revisions to the body of the text, instead reserving the majority of changes to a new introduction. In his original analysis, which he thematically arranges from the outside in, Tomich details the impact of evolving market conditions in slave-dependent, agricultural economies on the nature of slavery and slave relations in Martinique at the eve of emancipation.

Beginning with the rise of British control over international sugar production and consumption, Tomich outlines the ensuing transformation of labor practices as slavery was forced to acknowledge, if not bend to, capitalistic considerations of efficiency and competition. The French response to this transformation included a renewed effort at protectionism—largely through tariffs on foreign sugar and backed by an expanding naval force—in an attempt to prop up the empire's wealth on the back of Martinique's sugar econo-

my. With imperial concentration came colonial expansion but also the realities of outside market forces; the threat of British abolitionism to the labor force, new competition from domestic beet-sugar production; and the physical boundaries of arable land inherent to the island's natural borders. Each factor circumvented the ability of planters in Martinique to fully capitalize on their enviable position in the world economy.

Framing his work around this overarching and defining consequence, Tomich argues this period represented a structural crisis that pushed plantation-style production to its limits, eventually ending its reliance upon slavery. As an example, Tomich cites the inability of Martinique's slave owners, who were bound by crop-driven arrangements of their labor force, to fully incorporate scientific and technological innovations to the degree of their emerging competitors, effectively leaving behind Martinique and its increasingly antiquated labor practices. Inability, as Tomich critically insists, did not mean these planters lacked the desire to more fully participate in emerging trends. In fact, attempts were made to fundamentally restructure certain processes, for example with the advent of the *usine centrale* or central refinery that would serve multiple plantations. Yet in the end these attempts were deemed unviable due to economic and so-

cial costs. This last constraint, the impact of diminishing social status among an established planter elite as a prohibitive to change, most notably in the threat to reduce estate owners to mere cultivators, adds an important thread to the long-standing discussion on slavery's compatibility with capitalism,

Tomich concludes his original analysis with two chapters devoted to the impact a maturing, global sugar economy had upon Martinique's slave community. Notably, he insists that these slaves seized upon both external forces and internal crises to push for enhanced degrees of autonomy and freedom. Of particular interest, although not exclusive to Martinique, were the specific ways these slaves exercised control and authority over their lives, including both day-to-day resistance and outright rebellion. Additionally, Tomich notes how slave autonomy emerged in the form of provision plots and independent marketing, with each practice occurring against the backdrop and overriding concerns of plantation production and profit. In this perspective, the precarious position of Martinique's planters, brought about by the deleterious influence of an advancing world economy that they could not keep up with, forced significant concessions to a labor force they hoped they could maintain as a bulwark against further erosion. Instead, these concessions served to irrevocably undermine that very institution.

The value of *Slavery in the Circuit of Sugar's* reissue primarily lies in the new introduction, in which Tomich expands his original analysis by explaining the methodological and theoretical underpinnings of his attempt to understand Martinique's sugar-based slavery through a world-systems perspective. Based on this interpretation, the need for a reissue is partially explained by a similar, current emphasis among scholars of slavery and capitalism to view the latter not as the beginning and end of the former, but rather an evolving process whose transitions over time were reflected in the local institutionalization of slavery.

Although published twenty-seven years ago, Tomich's initial focus in *Slavery in the Circuit of Sugar* nevertheless mirrors recent works including those of Edward Baptist, Sven Beckert, and Robin Blackburn. These scholars, like Tomich, move beyond simple identification of interconnectivity between slavery and world market conditions to view larger economic conditions as a dynamic agent of influence and change upon local labor forms.[1] For Martinique, this relationship was "simultaneous and mutually formative" and best understood as a "unified, structured, contradictorily evolving whole" (p. 5).

At the center of the new introduction is an extended exegesis on Karl Marx's theories on capitalism and Immanuel Wallerstein's arguments on world systems in relation to their different treatment of labor and Tomich's attempt to reconcile these two abstract principals with the specific historical context of Martinique's sugar-based economy in the nineteenth century. The backdrop of these two conceptual centerpieces explains the nontraditional focus—at least at a time when most scholars were looking at slavery from inside its community rather than outside—on sugar over slavery, a dynamic which Tomich labels the primary "organizing thread" in this work. One can see the degree to which Tomich, in privileging economic elements over social foundations, relies upon Marx and in particular Wallerstein to produce a theoretically grounded analysis on "the capitalist character of slavery and the slave character of capitalism" (pp. 38-39). As a result, the reissue of *Slavery in the Circuit of Sugar* remains a testament to these influences while providing considerable further explanation.

It should also be noted that the insistence on a revised framework of interpreting slavery more thoroughly through a global economic context is directly related to another contemporary analytical field, known as "second slavery" studies. This field attempts to distinguish new zones of slavery emerging in relation to changes in the wider eco-

nomic, political, and social background. Immensely influential in this scholarship, Tomich's early effort at distinguishing changes in labor practices according to shifts in world markets in *Slavery in the Circuit of Sugar* provides an additional rationale for the reissue. The principal treatment for this topic is most apparent in one of Tomich's final chapters that discusses the role of technology in determining slave labor patterns.

Using the example of the mechanization of sugar mills in relation to the use of forced labor, Tomich moves beyond a static argument centered on compatibility to emphasize how the "mutual determination of slave labor, land and technology" impacted the "reconstitution of slave labor under new word-economic conditions" (p. 436n41). Despite having been written nearly three decades ago, the nuanced insistence on both interconnected processes and the ensuing change over time provides a seamless integration of the most current discussions in slave studies.

It is also possible to see, retrospectively, the early formations of what Tomich himself would later label "the second slavery," a conceptual catalyst that would generate a multitude of important lines of inquiry. This is especially apparent in his claim that the inability of sugar planters to incorporate technical advancements, while inhibiting their ability to compete on a world stage, did not alone cause the destruction of slavery on the island. Essentially, the internal determination of slave laborers drove external economic and political considerations to the coming of island-wide emancipation, a moment in time that shifted the balance of power in these mutually arranged forces.

Geared more towards an academic audience with often dense prose ("this conceptual strategy discloses firmly linked spatial-temporal differences shaping the nexus of market and production and recovers the temporal and spatial dimensions of political economic processes as themselves products of historical development," p. 397)

this reissue, with a new introduction as well as its original analysis, is nevertheless a valuable contribution to the recent focus on contextualizing slavery by emphasizing its defining relationship with the "wider world-market." Yet, because Tomich has left the body of his work unchanged, the resonance of these early thoughts on current scholarship remains only an initial, brief reference point.

Note

[1]. Among others, see the following works, each of which stem from much earlier investigations by Eric Williams, C. L. R. James, and W. E. B. Du Bois: Edward E. Baptist, *The Half Has Never Been Told: Slavery and the Making of American Capitalism* (New York: Basic Books, 2014); Sven Beckert, *Empire of Cotton: A Global History* (New York: Vintage, 2015); and Robin Blackburn, *The American Crucible: Slavery, Emancipation And Human Rights* (London: Verso, 2013).

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