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The Colonial Caribbean: Landscapes of Power in Jamaica's Plantation System

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James A. Delle

The Colonial Caribbean: Landscapes of Power in Jamaica's Plantation System. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2014. xv + 265 pp. (Paper US\$ 32.99)

This interesting book explores the landscape of a Jamaican coffee estate through an explicitly Marxist lens that emphasizes power, surveillance, settlement patterns, and the spatial manifestations of plantation social relations. Drawing on archaeological evidence, plantation records, GIS data, and colonial maps, James Delle shows how changing modes of production from the period of Spanish colonization, through plantation slavery and the postemancipation rise of peasantries, altered the Jamaican landscape. More importantly, he argues that the landscape reveals inherent contradictions within the plantation mode of production in Jamaica, which reinforced the hierarchical structure of the plantation system, but at the same time inspired the 1831 slave uprising and the eventual abolition of slavery. Delle's Marxist perspective draws heavily on historical materialism and seeks to highlight the way dialectical conflict spurred economic and social change and left its mark on the Jamaican landscape.

The book begins with a historical overview of Jamaica to show how different modes of production shaped the settlement of the island. Using creative GIS modeling techniques, Delle explores settlement trends from the early days of Spanish ranching in the sixteenth century to the British colonial plantation economy of the eighteenth. During the period of Spanish control, Jamaica developed largely independent of Spanish imperial control and capital investment. The landscape consisted of sparsely populated settlements on widely dispersed ranches located primarily along the southern coast. The British captured Jamaica from the Spanish in 1655 and small farmers settled in former Spanish ranches. In the eighteenth century, the plantation mode of production reshaped the landscape as large planters backed by overseas investors consolidated small estates. Located primarily along the southern coast and at lower elevations, these large planters established estates in areas where they could take advantage of river systems and have easy access to ports. By the end of the nineteenth century, plantations were emerging further inland and at higher elevations. The expansion of settlements into these rural highland districts was driven in large part by the introduction of coffee, which was well suited for these rugged areas and higher elevations.

Delle's primary interest is in interpreting the landscape of coffee estates in the parish of St. David. He outlines the social structure and work regimen of coffee cultivation and processing in Jamaica, arguing that the placement of buildings on coffee estates was dictated by the nature of the plantation system.

The living quarters for plantation overseers, for example, were strategically located on coffee estates in St. David in order to regularly observe the work and domestic life of enslaved workers and at the same time reinforce the hierarchical social structure of the plantation system. Surveillance of enslaved workers by plantation overseers is a key element of Delle's overall argument that the plantation mode of production produced landscapes of power to maintain the status quo. He also explores how class consciousness among the planter elite was maintained through social gatherings and political maneuvering. Moreover, the planters' need to assert their power and maintain security determined the placement of great houses in St. David.

A central argument of this book is that contradictions in the plantation mode of production led to dialectical conflicts that would only be resolved through revolutionary change. These changes, Delle claims, are evident in the coffee landscapes of St. David; the contradiction is that enslaved workers were free to grow and sell goods produced on their provision grounds as small entrepreneurs, yet they remained enslaved. Delle analyzes the location of slave villages and provision grounds at the Marshall's Pen coffee estate to show the spatial expression of this contradiction. Moreover, the archaeological record from the village sites of enslaved workers on the estate highlights their increasing participation in the expanding consumer revolution of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Their consumerism is especially evident in the increasing acquisition and use of imported mass-produced English ceramics and the declining use of locally made ceramic forms. Delle provides an overview of postemancipation changes to the landscape in Jamaica as coffee production collapsed and peasantries emerged, and concludes with a comparative analysis of plantation landscapes from Virginia.

The book is well written and organized. Given Delle's emphasis on the role of provision grounds in shaping the contradictions in Jamaica's plantation mode of production, it is a bit surprising that he does not explicitly address Sidney Mintz's concept of proto-peasantries. Moreover, David Geggus's analysis of the work regimen on coffee estates in St. Domingue would have been useful in the discussion of Jamaican coffee production. By studying the landscape changes in Jamaica and the archaeological evidence from the villages of enslaved workers, *The Colonial Caribbean* thoughtfully contributes to our understanding of the history of slavery and plantation life in Jamaica. It will be a welcome classroom text for Caribbean archaeology courses.

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