Introduction

The great majority of slaves in the British Americas began their work days with the rising sun and ended them sometime after sundown. Work was the *raison d'etre* of the system of slavery. In the eighteenth century, an improvement movement swept through the British Americas, changing how planters conceptualized and managed their plantations. The working world of the plantation was transformed by new management theories, which were in turn shaped by broader Atlantic discourses about moral reform and scientific and agricultural improvement. The Enlightenment conviction that moral and economic progress were compatible led planters to believe that increasing productivity could accompany benevolent management.

The new work routines and management systems had a considerable impact on the day-to- day lives of slaves. Work influenced the formation of slaves' families, their community hierarchies and dynamics, and their morbidity, fertility, and mortality rates. Given the critical role that work played in shaping the lives slaves led, it is striking how often slavery scholars have overlooked the details of slave labor, focusing instead on other aspects of the institution and the lives of the people within it.[1] The vast majority of a plantation slave's waking hours were spent working, and new forms of labor discipline and supervision in the eighteenth century enabled planters to extract more working hours and greater physical efforts on a wider variety of tasks from their slaves.

In the last half of the twentieth century, slavery scholars were at the forefront of a paradigm shift in historical studies that made agency and

[1] Ira Berlin and Philip D. Morgan, "Labor and the Shaping of Slave Life in the Americas" in Berlin and Morgan, eds., *Cultivation and Culture: Labor and the Shaping of Slave Life in the Americas*. (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1993) 1–48.

resistance central themes in the study of subalterns.[2] They began to focus on what slaves did on their own time rather than under the eyes of the master.[3] The resistance paradigm helped to dismantle the racist conceptual apparatus that enabled slavery to be described as a benevolent institution.[4] It also made it clear that slaves were never simply passive victims or complicit actors in their own tragedy. Nevertheless, a growing number of critics have pointed out that the emphasis on autonomous and successfully resistant slaves and slave cultures has gone too far. In the 1990s, Sidney Mintz was one of many scholars calling for a new approach to studying the lived experience of slavery because, as he explained, on sugar plantations, "only a tiny fraction of daily life consisted of open resistance. Instead most of life then, like most of life now, was spent living."[5] To appreciate the lived experience of enslaved peoples, we need to know more about what kind of work they did and when and how it changed.

In the twenty-first century, the resistance paradigm continues to be entrenched in slave studies because it is so intricately interwoven with a particular set of beliefs that scholars have held about the nature of the institution.[6] The tendency in the literature on slavery is to stress the chattel principle of slavery and to cast slavery as the polar opposite of freedom;

[2] For a prominent example see Michael Mullin, *Africa in America: Slave Acculturation and Resistance in the American South and the British Caribbean, 1736–1831* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1992); for historiographical overviews see Robert William Fogel, *Without Consent or Contract: The Rise of American Slavery* (New York: Norton, 1989), 154–198, and Robert L. Paquette, "Social History Update: Slave Resistance and Social History, "*Journal of Social History* 24.3 (Spring 1991), 681–685.

[3] Peter A. Coclanis, "The Captivity of a Generation." *William and Mary Quarterly* 61.3 (July 2004), 544–555.

[4] For examples of how some of the older literature casts slavery as a benevolent institution, see Ulrich Bonnel Phillips, *American Negro Slavery: A Survey of the Supply, Employment and Control of Negro Labor as Determined by the Plantation Regime*. (New York: D. Appleton & Company, 1952 [1918]; H. J. Eckenrode, "Negroes in Richmond in 1864," *Virginia Magazine of History and Biography* 46.3 (July 1938), 193–200.

[5] Sidney Mintz, "Slave Life on Caribbean Sugar Plantations: Some Unanswered Questions," in Stephen Palmie, ed., *Slave Cultures and the Cultures of Slavery* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1995),13; Palmie, "Introduction," in Palmie, ed. *Slave Cultures*, xviii; Robert William Fogel and Stanley L. Engerman, "Changing Views of Slavery in the United States South: The Role of Eugene D. Genovese," in Robert Louis Paquette and Louis A. Ferleger, eds., *Slavery, Secession and Southern History* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 2000), 6; Fogel, *Without Consent or Contract*, 154–198.

[6] For recent examples of the continuing emphasis on resistance and cultural survivals as resistance see Eric Robert Taylor, *If We Must Die: Shipboard Insurrections in the Era of the Atlantic Slave Trade* (New Orleans: Louisiana State University Press, 2006); James H. Sweet, *Recreating Africa: Culture, Kinship, and Religion in the African-Portuguese World, 1441–1770* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2003).

scholars depict the institution as being uniquely different from other forms of coerced labor.[7] Slavery has been fetishized as a subject; the institution has been cast as aberrant. By representing slavery as the absolute denial of freedom and as distinctly different from other forms of early modern labor, scholars are led to search for the ways in which slaves resisted total domination and struggled to obtain freedom from their bondage. Within this investigative framework, slaves become political actors more than laboring people, which constrains the kinds of inquiries historians are able to make about the day-to-day experiences of enslaved workers. In slave studies, the scholarly emphasis on resistance and on the quest for freedom makes it a highly politicized subject, given modern concerns with individual freedom, but it also makes the investigation transhistorical, because it fails to contextualize the ways in which either resistance or freedom were both defined and experienced at particular places and points in time. Freedom is an abstract and historically contingent concept. There are a wide range of social conditions and cultural boundaries at any given time that place restrictions on individual freedom, and the ways in which individuals and societies understand, value, and pursue freedom has changed over time.[8]

Slavery was a brutal and violent institution, and the chattel principle, in some ways, made it distinct from other forms of coerced labor (such as naval impressment or indentured servitude), but it was also one of many forms of dependency in the hierarchical world of the eighteenth-century Atlantic. Thus, the violence within slavery must be understood as part of a spectrum of violence in the early modern world.[9] In terms of the daily

[7] James Oakes, *Slavery and Freedom: An Interpretation of the Old South* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1990), xiv-xv; David Brion Davis, *Inhuman Bondage: The Rise and Fall of Slavery in the New World* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 29–35.

[8] Robert J. Steinfeld, *Coercion, Contract and Free Labor in the Nineteenth Century* (New York, Cambridge University Press, 2001); Matthew C. Pursell, "Changing Conceptions of Servitude in the British Atlantic, 1640–1780," Ph.D. Dissertation. (Brown University, May 2005); Robert J. Steinfeld, "Changing Legal Conceptions of Free Labor," in Stanley Engerman, ed., *Terms of Labor: Slavery, Serfdom, and Free Labor* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999), 137–167; Stanley L. Engerman, "Slavery at Different Times and Places," *American Historical Review* 105.2 (2000), 480–484; Marcel van der Linden, "The Origins, Spread and Normalization of Free Wage Labour," in Tom Brass and Marcel van der Linden, eds. *Free and Unfree Labor: The Debate Continues* (New York: Peter Lang, 1997), 501–524; Robert. J. Steinfeld and Stanley Engerman, "Labor- Free or Coerced? A Historical Reassessment of Differences and Similarities," in Brass and van der Linden, eds., *Free and Unfree Labor*, 107–126.

[9] Kenneth Morgan, *Slavery and Servitude in Colonial North America: A Short History* (New York, New York University Press, 2001); Robert J. Steinfeld, *The Invention of Free Labor: the Employment Relation in English and American Law and Culture, 1350–1870* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1991); Steinfeld, *Coercion, Contract and Free*

experience of the workers, slavery was not altogether different from other systems of forced labor. Freedom was attainable only by degrees for the vast majority of workers in the Atlantic. From apprentices to convict slaves, the early modern Atlantic was an unfree world. Most workers were dependent, bound, or coerced in some way, denied specific bundles of rights and freedoms. The difference between slavery and other forced labor systems is more a matter of degree than kind.

The scholarly emphasis on slavery as the complete denial of freedom and as a unique institution has distorted the kinds of questions we have asked about the lived experience of enslavement. By transforming slaves into resistant subalterns battling for freedom, we have made a caricature of them, undermining our ability to understand them as human actors living within a coerced labor system that placed severe constraints on their ability to exercise any kind of opposition to slavery or attain any significant autonomy. Agency is an inadequate concept in the study of plantation slavery. It is unsuitable for discussing forced labor scenarios in which there is a significant asymmetrical power imbalance between masters and slaves.[10]

What is needed in slave studies is a paradigm shift, a new set of questions altogether. We need to reimagine slaves as much more complex than just politicized actors engaged with their master in an endless contest for freedom. Historians have now long debated the degrees by which each party in this contest proved to be the victor or the vanquished. The history of slavery is more than a history of winners and losers. Thinking about slaves foremost as coerced laborers and about slavery as a kind of labor history allows us to ask questions about these peoples' experience of particular working worlds.[11] To reconceptualize slaves in this way, scholars must avoid fetishizing the violence within slavery or casting the system as unique. They need to recognize it as part of an early modern world in which most laborers (and whole groups of people, such as women or children) experienced some degree of coercion.

Labor; Pursell, "Changing Conceptions of Servitude"; Steinfeld, "Changing Legal Conceptions of Free Labor"; John Donoghue, "'Out of the Land of Bondage:' The English Revolution and the Atlantic Origins of Abolition," *The American Historical Review* 115.4 (2010), 943–974.

[10] Walter Johnson, "On Agency," *Journal of Social History* 37.1 (Fall 2003), 113–124.

[11] For examples of the work now being done on slavery as a kind of labor history, see Frederick C. Knight, *Working the Diaspora: The Impact of African Labor on the Anglo-American World, 1650–1850* (New York: New York University Press, 2010); Seth Rockman, *Scraping By: Wage Labor, Slavery, and Survival in Early Baltimore* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2009); Stuart Schwartz, *Slaves, Peasants and Rebels: Reconsidering Brazilian Slavery* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1992); Berlin and Morgan, eds., *Cultivation and Culture*.

In this sense, eighteenth-century slavery was neither aberrant nor peculiar. It was not distinct but rather part of a spectrum of laboring experiences. The story of eighteenth-century slavery in the British Atlantic is more complex than a simple contest between heroically resisting bondsmen and their evil oppressors. Instead, it is a far richer story of a particular group of early modern laborers and their complex and changing worlds.

By privileging freedom as an essential element in the transition to a modern and industrialized world, eighteenth-century antislavery activists and generations of subsequent scholars have mischaracterized slavery and underestimated the adaptability of forced labor systems. Since the eighteenth century, stage-based and whiggish theories of human development have represented slavery as a stage of development that was incompatible with progress, capitalism, technological innovation, industrialization, and with the rise of civilized and enlightened nations – indeed, with the rise of modernity.[12] Yet slavery is, in some ways, more suitable than most systems of labor for capitalist innovation. The extreme degree of coercion and control in slavery is part of what makes it suitable. Because slavery guarantees a captive labor force, which slaveholders can easily allocate to a variety of labors, the institution reduces the risks inherent in acquiring and maintaining labor. By reducing the risks in labor management, slavery offset the potential risks that came with technological innovation and change. Slavery is an immoral and dehumanizing labor system, but it is also highly adaptable, viable, and flexible, and it is fully consistent with economic progress. It is critical not to conflate arguments about the immorality of slavery with arguments about its efficiency or viability.[13]

In the eighteenth century, most of the managerial staff and the owners of large slave plantations were convinced that there was nothing backward about plantation slavery. In response to the growing critique of slavery and the slave trade, these planters offered an alternative vision of the relationship between slavery and human progress. They stressed the need to discipline the unenlightened, and they conceptualized work, forced or free, as an innate good because it contributed directly to economic progress and inculcated habits of industry that would be morally redemptive. They measured progress and improvement by the size of their crops and by how much labor

[12] Seymour Drescher, *The Mighty Experiment: Free Labour Versus Slavery in British Emancipation* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002); Oakes, *Slavery and Freedom*, 53.

[13] Robert William Fogel, *The Slavery Debates: A Retrospective, 1952–1990* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2003), 24–48.

they could extract from their human capital. Many scholars have stressed how Enlightenment principles of liberty and natural rights created revolutionary fervor throughout the Atlantic and pathways to freedom for slaves. Yet, certain sets of Enlightenment principles also helped to cultivate a series of darker outcomes for slaves, and scholars have underplayed those connections. Planters, driven by the Enlightenment commitment to progress and inspired by Newtonian universalism and Baconian empiricism, developed new management systems geared toward extracting more work from enslaved workers. The Enlightenment gave rise to a new set of moral sensibilities that reduced some of the physical barbarity within slavery and ended the slave trade, and it also advanced ideas about freedom and free labor that helped to dismantle the institution of slavery altogether. Yet, at the same time, there was also a ruthless rationalism to the Enlightenment and a pragmatism and expediency that helped foster industrialization, factory discipline, and, in the plantation Americas, more exhausting plantation work regimes in which planters strove to reduce the workers into depersonalized and interchangeable units of production.[14] This was the dark side of the Enlightenment.

On large plantations, there was a multilayered hierarchy of white managers. The highest authorities were the people who made long-term decisions about planting, such as the resident plantation owners and the plantation attorneys, who were legally empowered to make decisions for absentee owners. These attorneys were often resident plantation owners who also supervised one or more estates for absentee owners. Sometimes absentee owners were involved regularly in the operations of the plantation, and sometimes they left the management almost entirely to the managerial staff of the plantation. Beneath this executive class of plantation owners and attorneys was the chief overseer, who was sometimes called a manager,

[14] Roy Porter, *The Creation of the Modern World: The Untold Story of the British Enlightenment* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2000); Joel. Mokyr, *The Enlightened Economy: An Economic History of Britain, 1700–1850* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009); Joel Mokyr, "The European Enlightenment and the Origins of Economic Growth," in Jeff Horn et al., eds., *Reconceptualizing the Industrial Revolution* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2010), 65–86; Susan Manning and Frances D. Cogliano in "The Enlightenment and the Atlantic," Manning and Cogliano, eds., *Atlantic Enlightenments* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2008), 1–18; Dorinda Outram, *The Enlightenment*, 2nd ed. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 61–77; Trevor Burnard, *Mastery, Tyranny and Desire: Thomas Thistlewood and His Slaves in the Anglo-Jamaican World* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004), 101–174; Lynn Avery Hunt, *Inventing Human Rights: A History* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2007), 70–112, 146–175.

and below him was one or more overseers. These were the men who made day-to-day decisions about planting. In theory, they carried out the orders of their superiors, but this was not always the case and tensions between higher and lower levels of management were common. At the bottom rung among the white planting staff in the Caribbean were the bookkeepers, who served as assistants to the overseer. There were also white staff who were employed either permanently or intermittently on the plantation as doctors or tradesmen. This book uses "planters" as a collective term for the plantation owners and their white managerial staff, but it will draw distinctions between these planters whenever their perspectives or interests differed significantly. For the most part, the discussion of planters' approaches to plantation management will focus on those people who were involved in developing agricultural strategies or in supervising enslaved labor.[15]

Slavery and Enlightenment in the British Atlantic operates on three levels. It is a labor history of slaves on large eighteenth-century plantations, a business history of plantation management, and a cultural and intellectual history of the ways in which planters conceptualized the management of a plantation and its laborers. This book examines slaves' lived experience in detail, focusing on the activity that consumed most of their days: work. It identifies the precise kinds of chores slaves did day to day, the ways in which plantation work routines changed with the season of production, and the relationship between the working world and the slaves' health, their families, and the communities they formed. It also explores planters' ideas about work routines and about slaves' capacities for work, and the operation of those ideas in daily practice. It will argue that work was the key factor in shaping slaves' lives and their communities, and that work routines on the mainland and in the Caribbean were shaped by dynamic and evolving plantation management schemes that were heavily influenced by the same pan-Atlantic Enlightenment discourses.

The dictates of nationalist historiographies, the ways in which modern political divisions shape the boundaries that historians draw around their subjects, and lingering myths about American exceptionalism have encouraged scholars to think of Barbados and Jamaica as part of a Caribbean world that was distinctly different – especially after 1783 – from the thirteen colonies that formed the United States. The movement toward Atlantic history among early Americanists has led to a reconsideration of the discipline's traditional

[15] The best work on the managerial staff of large plantations is B. W. Higman, *Plantation Jamaica; Capital and Control in a Colonial Economy, 1750–1850* (Kingston, Jamaica: University of the West Indies Press, 2005).

regional divisions; it has also drawn more scholarly attention to the ways in which areas throughout the Anglo-American world continued to share certain historical trajectories after the American Revolution.

The three specific regions under investigation in this study – Virginia, Jamaica, and Barbados – varied significantly in their physical size, climate, and landscapes; their black-to-white and African-to-creole ratios, the demands and intensity of their labor regimes, the degree to which their slave populations were self-reproducing, the number of resident planters, the extent to which their production was diversified, and the proportion of land under cultivation. This study explores these contrasts and the similarities among all three regions, attempting – whenever the evidence allows – to avoid grouping the Caribbean into one region and characterizing it as the polar opposite of the Chesapeake.

The one area of mainland North America that most resembled the Caribbean sugar islands was the Lowcountry. Its massive rice and indigo plantations, its climate, its slave majority, and its poor rates of natural reproduction among the slaves make the Lowcountry a more obvious point of comparison with the Caribbean than does the Chesapeake. Yet a comparison of South Carolina, for example, and Jamaica would not reveal findings that would surprise scholars or advance the literature in as meaningful a way. In contrast, the Chesapeake was not a fully integrated part of a greater Caribbean world and, given the significant demographic differences and reproductive rates between enslaved populations in Virginia and most areas of the Caribbean, one would expect there to be sharp contrasts in plantation management and in the work routines of slaves. By using Virginia instead of South Carolina as a point of comparison with Barbados and Jamaica, *Slavery and Enlightenment in the British Atlantic* seeks to uncover significant and unexplored similarities in the ideas that drove plantation management on large plantations in places that, on a superficial level, appear so strikingly different.

Barbados, in the eastern Caribbean, is the oldest of the sugar islands in the British Caribbean. It is unique in the history of the British Caribbean. It is almost 100 miles east of the rest of the Windward Island chain. That distance helped ensure that the island was never invaded or seriously threatened by a foreign power. Without the constant threat of invasion, living and planting in Barbados was always less risky than in other sugar islands. The trade winds also kept the island slightly cooler than most of the Caribbean. By the late eighteenth century, Barbados had the largest proportion of resident planters and the highest proportion of white settlers among the major sugar islands. Many of the resident planters came from

families that had been on the island since the sugar revolution of the seventeenth century. Despite the constant decline of the enslaved population until the end of the eighteenth century, there were a growing number of enslaved workers whose parents and grandparents were Barbadian-born. Enslaved family lineages began to develop on Barbadian plantations. Sugar planting became part of a family tradition for both whites and their black bondsmen. Resident planters understood well how to cultivate the crop, and Barbadians were the vanguard of the movement to improve sugar planting. Other planters in the sugar islands commonly pointed to the Barbadians as the most skilled and efficient of all planters.[16] The second plantation manual in the British Caribbean, published in 1755, was written by a Barbadian, and the first agricultural society devoted to sugar planting appeared in Barbados in 1804.[17]

There was far more uniformity in the geographical conditions on Barbados than in Jamaica. Barbados is a tiny island (166 square miles) and, compared to most of the other major sugar islands in the British Caribbean, the terrain is generally flat.[18] Throughout most of Barbados, the climate, terrain, and soils were ideal for growing sugar. The interior Scotland District is the most rugged and hilly region of Barbados. It comprised about 20 percent of the island but there is no significant elevation in the interior. Sugar cane is a tropical or subtropical grass, which grows best where it receives 1,500–1800 mm of rain a year, but it can tolerate more rain or slightly less.[19] Average annual rainfall in Barbados ranges from 1,000 mm on the southeast coast to 2,280 mm in the interior, making most of the island ideal for sugar cultivation. By the end of the seventeenth century, the forest cover had been almost entirely cleared, and sugar was being grown on every tillable square foot of the island.[20] The uniformity in climate and geographical conditions made Barbadian plantations excellent sites for experimentation, and it made it easier for planters to share ideas

[16] Patrick Kein, *An Essay upon Pen-Keeping and Plantership* (Kingston, Jamaica: His Majesty's Printing Office, 1796), 26; Samuel Martin, *Essay upon Plantership*, 4th ed. (London: Samuel Chapman, 1765), 7.

[17] William Belgrove, *A Treatise upon Husbandry or Planting* (Boston: D. Fowle, 1755). *Minutes of the Society for the Improvement of Plantership in the Island of Barbados* (Liverpool: Thomas Kaye, 1811).

[18] Richard B. Sheridan, *Sugar and Slavery: The Economic History of the British West Indies* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press 1974), 127.

[19] Michael Craton, *Searching for the Invisible Man: Slaves and Plantation Life in Jamaica* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1978), 9.

[20] Russell Menard, *Sweet Negotiations: Sugar, Slavery, and Plantation Agriculture in Early Barbados* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2006).

about agricultural improvement and compare their results – their plantations became laboratories. Without rugged terrain, the slave's field work on Barbadian estates was also less arduous than it was on the steeper and mountainous grounds found in many of Jamaica's parishes.

The seventeenth century was the golden age of Barbadian sugar production, but, by the eighteenth century, Barbadians had to grapple with significant cultivation issues and rising competition from other sugar frontiers. A sugar revolution in the late 1640s transformed Barbados, and it became by far the richest of the English colonies in the Americas – a position it held until the early eighteenth century.[21] Deforestation and intensive cane agriculture caused the soil quality to decline and created land and fuel shortages. By the second quarter of the eighteenth century, the Leeward Islands, led by Antigua, took over from Barbados as the primary sugar-producing region in the British Caribbean.[22] To maximize their dwindling resources and remain competitive, eighteenth-century Barbadians were forced to hone their skills and innovate. They adopted new methods of cane holing to prevent erosion; they addressed the fuel shortage by using cane trash instead of wood to stoke the fires in the boiling house; they revitalized the soils with extensive manuring.[23]

Jamaica in the Western Caribbean and Barbados in the Eastern Caribbean were not only more than 1,300 miles from each other, they were at opposite ends of a spectrum of sugar production in the British Caribbean. They had distinctly different histories and landscapes. In contrast to tiny Barbados, Jamaica, in the western Caribbean, was by far the largest of the British Caribbean sugar islands. At more than 4,400 square miles, it is about twenty-five times the size of Barbados.[24] Unlike Barbados, the terrain, forest cover, and climate vary greatly across Jamaica, and planters have distinctly different geographical concerns throughout the island. Whereas all of Barbados could be cultivated for sugar, some areas of Jamaica, such as the Blue Mountains, were too steep and rugged to be viable lands for sugar plantations. Remote and often impenetrable mountain terrain fostered the

[21] David Eltis, *The Rise of African Slavery in the Americas* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 202; B.W. Higman, "The Sugar Revolution," *Economic History Review* 53.2 (2000): 213–236.
[22] Eltis, *Rise of African Slavery*, 193–22.
[23] David Watts, "Origins of Barbadian Cane Hole Agriculture," *Journal of the Barbados Museum and Historical Society*, 32.3 (May 1968), 143–151; David Watts, *The West Indies: Patterns of Development, Culture, and Environmental Change Since 1492* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 382–447.
[24] Sheridan, *Sugar and Slavery*, 208.