Sugar and Slavery in the Caribbean
17th and 18th Centuries

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Motivation for Sugar and Slavery in the Caribbean

- Increasing demand for sugar in Europe
- Instability of tobacco prices in early 18th century
- Sugarcane production in Brazil was not enough to satisfy Brits and Europeans
- Sugar went from being a luxury item to eventually being a commonly used product amongst all people
- Growing sugar cane on the island of Barbados became a golden opportunity for British colonists who could not compete with the production of tobacco in the other British colonies in North America
  - Excellent geography and climate made the growth of sugarcane less of a hassle
Introduction to Slavery in the Caribbean

- Slavery and the existence of sugar plantations in the Caribbean began to flourish upon arrival of the Dutch post-1645 decline in Pernambuco production.
- Dutch began to bring slaves and latest milling equipment to British and French settlers in Caribbean.
Race/Battle for Settlement

- English initially made much more headway than the French
  - 1640-English over 52,000 slaves on their islands of the Barbados, Nevis, and St.Kitts
  - French had no more than 2,000 white settlers on Martinique
- French growth steady over next two decades, by 1650’s there were 15,000 white Frenchmen on their islands
- Conflict between the two continued
- English failed to seize French island of Saint Domingue
  - English settled in Jamaica instead
  - French then followed with successful settlement of western Saint Domingue
Arrival of the Dutch

- Arrival of Dutch in the Caribbean made sugar much more viable proposition
- Dutch brought credit to import expensive machinery required to get mills into operation
  - Also provided slaves with the credit produced from the factories in El Mina and Luanda
Dutch Migration to the Caribbean

- 1640’s- Dutch planters with Pernambuco knowledge arrived in the Barbados islands, as well as Martinique and Guadeloupe to introduce modern milling techniques.
- 1654- mass migration of Dutch planters and their slaves to the Caribbean when Pernambuco and Olinda eventually fell to the Portuguese.
- 600 Dutchmen along with 300 slaves arrived on the islands of Guadeloupe and Martinique.
  - Around 1,000 or so landed on the Barbados islands.
- Though many colonists returned to the Netherlands, enough still remained in America so that their coming gave a major sugar boost to the Caribbean sugar industry in the 1650’s.
- These transplanted Dutchmen proved to be important in effectively transplanting sugar plantation system on islands.
Sugar Transforming the West Indies

- Barbados experienced dramatic transformation
- Other islands endured similar transformations, though were not as apparent
  - Wealth from sugar and slaves attracted new capital and slaves
Barbados Islands Transformation

- 1645-18,300 white males, only 5,680 were slaves
- 1670’s- Sugar became dominant product
- Number of farms down to 2,600 units, ¼ the amount that were in existence 15 years prior
- White population declined from 37,000 to around 17,000
- 1680- Number of slaves outnumbered whites
  - Almost all of slaves were African-born
  - About 50 slaves per plantation was norm
- About 350 sugar estates’ production increased to 8,000 tons of sugar per annum
- Of indentured whites, only 2,000 remained
- 100 slaves and about 220 acres of land per estate was average by 1730’s and 1740's
- Barbados then most populous and wealthiest of England's American colonies
- Slave ships bringing 1,300 slaves per annum
- End of century islands contained over 50,000 slaves
  - Likely most densely populated region in the Americas
French Islands Transformation

- Transformation similar to Barbados, though occurred at slower rate
- Free white labor force became more entrenched on the Islands of Martinique and Guadeloupe
- Small farm units not important by end of century
- Sugar began to occupy the best lands, flow of slaves stayed strong
- 1670- Martinique, Guadeloupe, and St. Christopher had about 300 sugar estates
- Increasing sugar production brought increasing slave arrivals
- Growth continued for French
  - Late 1660’s, French settlements achieved on abandoned western half of Santo Domingo
  - Region began slow, steady growth
  - Amount of slaves dramatically increased in the 1680’s
West Indies Islands Transformation

- Late 17th century sugar industry was similar to that of Brazil
  - 50 slaves per plantation was the norm
- Early 18th century, sugar moved into more open areas of Jamaica and Santo Domingo
- 1730’s and 1740’s average estate size reached over 200-acres
  - Average number of slaves approached 100
- Modern West Indian plantation system was full in place
- This plantation size became typical in 18th and 19th centuries in Caribbean
New Sugar and Slave Complex in British and French West Indies

- Non-Iberian Caribbean received over 450,000 slaves by the end of the 17th century
  - Put them second in slave trade, behind Brazil
  - This left Spanish America in third with 350,000-400,000
- Slave trade in French and English colonies in North America small compared to that of their territory in Caribbean islands
  - Probably less than 30,000 slaves before 1700
Development of Sugar and Slavery in Jamaica

- Originally overshadowed by islands of Martinique and Barbados
- Slow, steady growth of white and black populations
  - 1670's-white and black populations equal at about 17,000 inhabitants
- 1680's-sugar industry skyrocketed
- 1680's-slaves began arriving at rate of 3,600 per annum
- 1703-white population settled at 8,000
  - Slave population grew to 45,000
  - Rate of slave population growth continued later into 18th century
- 1720-slave population grew to 74,000
  - Island was most populated in British West Indies
- 1740-slave population reached 100,000
- 1768-slave population reached 167,000
  - White population only 18,000
Development of Sugar and Slavery in Jamaica

- Growth in slave population caused growth in number of plantations along with average size of plantations and increase in output per unit
- Jamaica was producing 36,000 tons of sugar per annum during this decade
- Growth due to increasing size of average estates
- 1740’s-Jamaica replaced Barbados as main English sugar producer
- ¾ island’s slave population devoted to sugar
- 1770’s-average estate had 204 slaves
- Along with growth and concentration of slave population came change in acreage of sugar estate and increasing concentration of ownership
- Average sugar estate eventually reached 1,147 acres
TO THE NEGRO POPULATION THROUGHOUT THE ISLAND OF JAMAICA.

My Friends,

Your good King, who was himself in Jamaica a long time ago, still thinks and talks a great deal of this Island, and has some say-how to take care of you, and to protect your rights; but he has also ordered me to see justice done to your owners, and to punish those who do wrong. Take my advice, for I am your friend—be sober, honest, and work well when you become APPRENTICES, for should you behave ill and refuse to work because you are no longer slaves, you will assuredly render yourselves liable to punishment.

The People of England are your friends and fellow-subjects—they have shown themselves such by passing a Bill to make you all Free. Your masters are also your friends; they have proved their kind feeling towards you all by passing in the House of Assembly the same Bill. The way to prove that you are deserving of all this goodness, is by labouring diligently during your APPRENTICESHIP.

You will, on the first of August next, no longer be slaves, but from that day you will be APPRENTICED to your former owners for a few years, in order to fit you all for freedom. It will therefore depend entirely upon you, your conduct, whether your APPRENTICESHIP be short or long, for should you runaway you will be brought back by the Masters and Police, and have to remain in APPRENTICESHIP longer than those who behave well.

You will only be required to work four days and a half in each week, the remaining day and a half in each week will be your own time, and you may employ it for your own benefit. Bear in mind that every one is obliged to work—some work with their hands, others with their heads, but no one can live and be considered respectable without some employment. Your lot is to work with your hands, I pray you therefore, do your part faithfully, for if you neglect your duty you will be brought before the Magistrate where the King has sent out to watch you, and they must act fairly and do justice to all by punishing those who are badly disposed. Do not listen to the advice of bad people, for should any of you refuse to do what the law requires of you, you will certainly repeat it, when at the end of the appointed time all your fellow labourers are released from APPRENTICESHIP, you find yourselves condemned to hard labour in the workhouse for a longed period, as a punishment for your disobedience.

If you follow my advice, and conduct yourselves well, nothing can prevent your being your own masters, and to labour only for yourselves, and your wives, and your children, at the end of four or six years, according to your respective classes.

I have not time to go into all the Properties in the Island and tell you this myself—I have therefore ordered this letter of Advice to be printed, and ordered it to be read to you all, that you may not be deceived and being yourselves into trouble by bad advice or mistaken notions.

I trust you will all be obedient and diligent subjects to our good King, so that he may never have cause to be sorry for all the good he has done for you.

Your friend and well wisher,

SLIGO,
Governor of Jamaica.
Development of Sugar and Slavery in Saint Domingue

- Growth similar to that of Jamaica
- Slow to develop, exposed to problems of international warfare
- Took Saint Domingue 80 years to pass up island of Martinique
- Sustained growth began in 1680
- Total population of 8,000
  - 2,000 of which were slaves
- 1701-number of sugar mills approached 122 mills total
- Saint Domingue ½ amount of slaves as Martinique
- First quarter of next century, Saint Domingue experienced insane expansion
- 1740-size of slave labor force passed that of Martinique by considerable amount
  - Saint Domingue 117,000 slaves close to half amount of French slaves in West Indies being 250,000
- Growth of white population slowed though continued to grow
- Developed relatively powerful class of free colored people
Saint Domingue

- Saint Domingue one of the French sugar colonies and it was the most successful sugar colony in the Caribbean by far.
- By the middle of the 18th centuries Saint Domingue was the most successful and dominant island in the Caribbean.
  - It was the best sugar producing colony.
  - It had the largest slave population in the Caribbean.
    - Saint Domingue had around 460,000 slaves almost half of the one million slaves that were in all of the Caribbean colonies.
  - Also became one of the world's leading producers of coffee a crop that was only introduced to the island in 1723.
- In the 1780's Saint Domingue's planters were called the most efficient and productive sugar planters in the world.
- Saint Domingue was responsible for two thirds of the sugar production of the French colonies and produced more sugar by itself than all of the British and Spanish colonies combined.
Rise of British and French dominance in the Caribbean
Rise of British and French

- The large rise of the British and French was in large part due to and powered by help from the Dutch.  
  - Until the 1650’s both the British and French were dependent on the Dutch for all aspects of sugar production including commercialization and provisioning of African slaves.

- The British and French gained more power and emerged as some of the biggest imperial power in Asia and the slave trade.

- This growth in power lead the French and British into conflict with their former partners the Dutch
  - The first of a few wars between the Dutch and British and French happened in 1652.
  - This was followed by a few more wars that basically destroyed the Dutch navy making them much less powerful.
Overcoming the Dutch

- The British and French imposed tariffs on the Dutch goods to break their dependence on them.
- By the last quarter of the 17th century, the British and French sugar production, shipping, and marketing was sufficient enough to break their dependence on the Dutch for European sugar markets and providing slaves.
- By the beginning of the 18th century, the British and French were much more dominant than the Dutch, and the only country that came close to them was the Portuguese.
- This ended the importance of the Netherlands as a major factor in Caribbean sugar production.
Dominating the European Sugar Markets

- By the first half of the 18th centuries the British and French were satisfying their own sugar needs.
- The English and French success in sugar production and trade affected the Brazilian sugar markets as well.
- At this time French and British markets were supplying sugar for basically all of eastern and northern Europe
  - In the 1660’s 80 percent of the sugar sold in London was from Brazil and in the 1690’s only 10 percent was from Brazil.
- The Brazilian sugar was not out of European markets for good the good quality of the Brazilian sugar made sure they stayed around.
- Due to extreme efficiency after a while the French sugar took over the continent of Europe weeding out the expensive British sugar.
Plantation Slavery System
Plantation Slavery system

- The reason for the start of plantation style slavery was simple; it was the most efficient and cheapest way to produce the most sugar or other crops as possible.
- By the middle of the 18th century, the slave plantation system was fully implemented in the Caribbean sugar colonies.
- During this time period, there were 1.4 million slaves in the Caribbean, which was 40 percent of the 3.5 million slaves in America.
- At the time, there were some people who argued that the free labor system was more efficient, but there was no way that the plantation owners could get white workers to get on their plantations.
- However, many slaves didn't want to work, and if they rebelled, the ability to force labor outweighed those negatives.
Lack of Sexual Inequality in Plantations

- The fact that plantations treated men and women slaves equal in terms of workload made them much more efficient.
  - All major jobs with planting, cultivation and harvesting of crops were done by both male and female slaves.
  - This rule did not apply to the distribution of skilled jobs which were only given to men.
- All jobs were assigned to slaves based on their physical ability and age no matter of the gender.
- There was also a lack of sexual inequality in the prices people would pay for slaves
  - Prices for an unskilled healthy male were the same as for a female up until early adulthood but after that the prices became the same again after the slaves passed their prime years.
Distribution of workers

● Usually there was about 100 slaves per plantation there were exceptions like in jamaica
● Slaves were divided into jobs that suited their age and how good of shape they were in.
  ○ Children and the elderly were given simple domestic and agricultural tasks.
● Usually about 50 to 60 percent of the slaves worked in the fields in work gangs.
● Ten percent of the slaves worked in the mills and refineries.
● Less than 5 percent were domestic servants
● the rest were skilled workers or too old or young to work.
Work Gangs

- Work gangs were a very common labor force in these sugar plantations.
  - Slaves that worked the fields were divided into three or four “gangs” based on their physical ability and age.
- Each gang was responsible for completing different jobs.
  - The first gang was made up of the most able-bodied men and women. This gang would be responsible for the most physically demanding jobs like clearing rocks and trees.
  - The middle gangs were responsible for agriculture.
  - The third/last gang was responsible for the easiest jobs like simple agricultural work. This gang included old slaves and kids. This gang was often called the weeding gang.
- All gangs were ran by female slaves.
Skilled Workers

- The percentage of slaves on Caribbean sugar plantations listed as skilled workers is actually pretty high.
- The skilled worker group of slaves were actually more important and a larger group than the domestic slaves in the sugar plantations.
- However, unlike the urban slaves of Portuguese America, the skilled slaves of the sugar plantation did not have great training.
  - They were often older men who were just taken off the field and given some basic training.
- The sugar colonies differed from plantations of other crops because they had more skilled workers due to the need to mill and refine sugar.
  - The refinery and mill workers were very skilled because they were trained their whole lives.