

The Colonial Caribbean: Landscapes of Power in the Plantation System

JAMES A. DELLE

Cambridge University Press, New York, NY, 2014. 265 pp., 64 figs., 7 tables, refs., index. \$32.99 paper.

James A. Delle's *The Colonial Caribbean: Landscapes of Power in the Plantation System* builds on his ongoing work at Jamaican coffee estates to interpret the Caribbean plantation in a strictly orthodox Marxist framework. What sets *The Colonial Caribbean* apart from other plantation studies is its use of a dialectical and fundamental Marxist approach to describe the plantation mode of production in colonial Jamaica. As such, the book stands as a novel contribution to Caribbean, plantation, landscape, and Marxist archaeologies through its approachable prose, rich historical content, multifaceted archaeological methodology, and theoretical clarity.

Delle unpacks the complexities of the materialist approach to human societies in order to demonstrate how a Marxist framework can be aptly applied to the coffee plantation mode of production in early-19th-century Jamaica. Of particular note is the way in which he provides careful and approachable explanations of essential Marxian concepts including mode of production, social division of labor, value, class consciousness, and dialectics. While the larger debate surrounding whether chattel slavery does or does not fit into the capitalist mode of production is only briefly considered, Delle demonstrates that the Marxist framework is useful for understanding how planters and laborers experienced multiple and sometimes

contradictory modes of production, leading to class conflict and change.

Combining island colonial history, political ecology, and GIS mapping techniques, Delle provides a vivid description of the development of the colonial Jamaican landscape inclusive of Spanish settlement, English acquisition in 1655, mercantilism, sugar production, and coffee production (chap. 2). The development of the colony was intimately tied to landscape and labor exploitation as planters accumulated land and forced enslaved Africans to manipulate the natural environment for agricultural production for the purposes of extracting surplus value. The implementation of landscape mapping techniques produces an effective body of data through which to identify and interpret settlement patterns. Despite underlying similarities in labor exploitation and spatial organization, Delle makes clear the distinctions between modes of production on sugar estates and coffee plantations. In the highland river valleys, landscape viewshed analysis is used to provide evidence for the physical manifestations of planter class consciousness (chap. 4). Of consequence is Delle's assessment that the planter class was composed of all white Jamaicans involved in the plantation mode of production including bookkeepers, overseers, managers, attorneys, and estate owners.

In contrast to his 1998 volume about contemporaneous coffee plantation landscapes in the Blue Mountains, Delle spends less time discussing planter/overseer, surveillance/control, and enslaved resistance. Instead, through historical and archaeological data collected for Marshall's Pen coffee plantation, he provides a detailed description of the economic networks

within which enslaved laborers operated. These included the receipt of provisions from planters, the cultivation of provision grounds, the sale of provisions and goods to planters, and the participation in local, regional, and global markets. Employing dialectical Marxism, Delle suggests that the increasing prominence of this mode of production stood in contradiction to that of the coffee plantation and slavery (chap. 5). As such, in Hegelian terms, the contradiction engendered a synthesis or drastic transformation in the mode of production.

Delle describes the new mode of production introduced to colonial Jamaica as the postemancipation decline of the plantation (as Jamaicans knew it) and the division of vast estates into smaller plots to be worked by free African Jamaicans. Delle uses pre- and postemancipation plantation maps to illustrate how African Jamaicans sparked a radical transformation of the landscape in the years of and after apprenticeship from 1834 to 1838 to facilitate a mode of production in which they could own small plots and be in control of their means of production (chap. 6). Delle's analysis is an important contribution to understandings of the localized effects of emancipation and the material conditions that led to its occurrence. While he does not engage with the broader economic and ethical debates surrounding emancipation that were circling throughout the Atlantic world during this time, his evidence provides support for the argument that a mode of production developed by the enslaved had a significant impact on changing the dominant mode of production.

Prior to the conclusion, Delle engages with 17th-century Virginia tobacco production as a comparative case study (chap. 7). In a similar manner to his treatment of Jamaican coffee plantations, the focus of analysis is the development of the plantation landscape,

with less emphasis on the material culture recovered from excavations. Reading historical and archaeological literature through a Marxist lens, Delle demonstrates that the landscape transformations that unfolded in 17th-century Virginia are related to shifting modes of production as settlers developed an efficient tobacco production scheme. As in the Jamaican case study, however, he notes that emerging contradictions surrounding access to land came to a head in the form of Bacon's Rebellion in 1676.

As a whole, *The Colonial Caribbean* is an engaging demonstration of the applicability of an orthodox Marxist model to geographically and temporally diverse plantation contexts. The book offers clear descriptions of Marxist social theory that are extremely useful for teaching purposes. Additionally, given that Marxist archaeological approaches to the plantation have been focused on American contexts, this book serves as a prime example of their usefulness for Caribbean archaeology. While the relationship between race and class is briefly discussed at different junctures, more engagement with Jamaican and Caribbean scholarship that directly and extensively discusses such entanglements in a Marxist framework would have strengthened Delle's arguments. More generally, those wary or critical of Marxist approaches will no doubt take issue with Delle's orthodox interpretation. The book remains, however, a strongly argued and well-supported analysis of the plantation in the materialist tradition that provides a valuable contribution to studies of colonial and capitalist landscapes.

MATTHEW C. REILLY
 JOUKOWSKY INSTITUTE FOR ARCHAEOLOGY
 AND THE ANCIENT WORLD
 BROWN UNIVERSITY
 60 GEORGE ST.
 PROVIDENCE, RI 02912