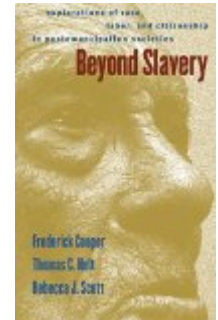


Frederick Cooper, Thomas C. Holt, Rebecca J. Scott. *Beyond Slavery: Explorations of Race, Labor, and Citizenship in Postemancipation Societies*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000. xii + 198 pp. \$34.95, cloth, ISBN 978-0-8078-2541-9.



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Published on H-South (September, 2003)

Several generations of Southern historians, along with scholars from all over the world, have taken advantage of the un-peculiar nature of slavery to produce a rich and illuminating comparative literature. It is probably no exaggeration to say that historians of U.S. slavery have done more to transcend the boundaries of national history, both through traditional comparative histories and in works of an Atlantic scope, than any other group of American historians. At present, to be truly conversant in the field of slave studies, one must have at least passing familiarity with the work on the British Caribbean, Cuba, Brazil, and Saint Domingue, to say nothing of related topics, such as the Atlantic slave trade and pre-colonial Africa.[1]

Given the size, scope, and sophistication of the literature on Atlantic slavery, as well as its general embrace by U.S. historians, it is perhaps surprising that the global literature on emancipation has had a much smaller impact.[2] The reason is not difficult to comprehend: emancipation for most U.S. historians falls under the purview of Civil War history, where, until relatively recently,

it often took a back seat to military and political issues. As a measurement of this oversight, neither of two widely used college Civil War textbooks makes any reference at all to the process of emancipation outside the United States.[3] The closest most students (and regrettably, many professional historians) come to a discussion of emancipation outside the United States is in the background to the Spanish-American War, a conflict whose very name, as Luis Perez points out, obscures its connections to the process of emancipation in Cuba.[4] Works on other Caribbean colonies, Brazil, and other regions of the world continue to elude the gaze of non-specialists.

The three excellent studies in Frederick Cooper, Thomas C. Holt, and Rebecca J. Scott's *Beyond Slavery: Explorations of Race, Labor, and Citizenship in Postemancipation Societies* constitute the most important interpretation to date of post-slavery in the Atlantic world. As the title suggests, the authors argue that in order to understand the process of emancipation, one must investigate the systems of labor that succeeded slavery. As Holt points out in his contribution, emancipations pri-

or to the nineteenth century had been accomplished largely through piecemeal manumissions (Haiti excepted), a process intrinsic to the functioning of most slave systems. "Why," he asks, "could emancipation not simply be manumission on a larger scale?" (p. 33). An excellent question: why did nineteenth-century emancipations entail such thoroughgoing social reconstruction? The answer has to do not only with the emergence of particular definitions of freedom and free labor, as well as the contests over their respective meanings, but with the emergence of a new political category—the citizen.

The volume begins with an extensive collaborative introduction that seeks common themes in the emancipation histories of the specific cases treated here, the British Caribbean (mostly Jamaica), Cuba, Louisiana, and colonial Africa. That emancipation in all of these places took place in the modern era is of prime importance, for the Age of Revolution had bequeathed two important developments: capitalism and liberalism. Both halves of this dual legacy presented colonial authorities with problems. In the case of the former, the need to continue staple-crop production and maintain the flow of profits and revenue necessitated new forms of labor that did not offend new understandings of freedom. In the latter's case, the presence of newly freed slaves, all of whom were at least partially descended from Africans and approximately half of whom were female, forced authorities to grapple in general with the place of freedpeople in the body politic, and the issues of race and gender in particular. It was one thing to manumit a slave in an era when everyone, no matter how dishonored, was a "subject of the King"; it was quite another to do so in an era that envisioned enfranchised citizens participating responsibly in civic affairs and working for landowners under no compulsion but that of starvation. To understand how these questions were resolved, the authors insist that we must recognize that "those struggles took place in a very specific context," and offer three (or really four) case

studies (p. 8). The purpose of the succeeding essays is not to establish a universal law or narrative concerning emancipation, but to explore widely varied postemancipation histories, with special sensitivity to local contexts.

Thomas Holt's essay, "The Essence of the Contract: The Articulation of Race, Gender, and Political Economy in British Emancipation Policy, 1838-66," argues that British policy underwent a fundamental transformation between the end of Apprenticeship in 1838 and the Morant Bay Rebellion in 1865, with the tipping point coming in the late 1840s. Readers familiar with Holt's excellent and authoritative *The Problem of Freedom* (1992) will recognize some of his arguments, but the essay contains enough new material to reward reading.[5] Adapting Habermas's concept of a bourgeois "public sphere," Holt views the process as the playing out of the contradictions inherent in bourgeois ideology.[6] In the classical liberal imagination, the public sphere was that space, independent of the state, whose chief function was the creation of public opinion, a "marketplace of ideas," or the civic analog of the economic marketplace. Liberals acknowledged no legitimate social antagonisms or conflicts, which allowed them to present self-interest as a virtue. Self-interest posed no threat to the social order because those who were allowed to pursue it were (ideally) inculcated from birth with the proper habits and values. The raising of responsible citizens occurred in the private sphere and was envisioned as a particularly feminine pursuit.

British policy was predicated on these principles, but failed when confronted with Jamaican reality. At first officials, such as colonial secretary Lord Glenelg, were optimistic that former slaves might be instilled with the requisite values, the same assumption that lay behind the apprenticeship policy of 1833-38. Glenelg believed in the universal applicability of liberal precepts, which implied the innate equality of all men. However, as Holt points out, the public sphere could not func-

tion, and in fact did not exist, in Jamaica because "slavery had produced a society divided into the powerful and the unprotected, the one dominating the public, the other outside it" (p. 43). Should former slaves actually pursue their political interests, the result would be disastrous to the planter class, nor could they be permitted to pursue their economic interests, since that would likely mean the loss of labor on the estates. Grappling with the contradiction, Glenelg advocated setting land prices at levels above the reach of most former slaves, hoping they would learn the value of accumulating capital on the way to becoming property owners. Finally, former slaves had their own competing public sphere with alternate values, one they were unlikely to abandon.

By the late 1840s former slaves had clearly not embraced bourgeois values as promoted by metropolitan authorities. The failure of what were understood to be universal principles in Jamaica might have set off an ideological crisis if an explanation had not been readily available. Fortunately for liberalism one was: Africans were innately unsuited for participation in civic affairs; Glenelg had been wrong. In the eyes of whites, both in Jamaica and in Britain, black domestic habits were particularly lacking. The tendency for former slaves to prefer peasant-style plots over work on the sugar estates prompted similarly racialized condemnations of black work habits. The Morant Bay Rebellion of 1865, in which over four hundred black Jamaicans were killed by colonial military forces for violently protesting a number of labor-related issues, further signified the African's unreadiness for participation in civic affairs. The culmination of this trend was the dissolution that same year of the Jamaica Assembly and the institution of direct rule by the crown.

Overall, Holt's application of Habermasian critical theory to Jamaica succeeds admirably. Its ability to encompass and synthesize a number of disparate themes in emancipation history—labor, race, gender, politics, ideology—recommends it as

a model for other parts of the Atlantic World. If the essay has any particular weakness, it is the failure to address fully the ideas and actions of Jamaican freedpeople themselves. Holt alludes to, but never explores, Jamaicans' "alternative conceptions of gender roles and identities, of family and community" (pp. 58-59). Similarly, the essay has little to say about the creation of the Jamaican peasantry except in reference to its emergence as a problem for policy makers. But on these matters we would do well to keep in mind the limited scope and purpose of the essay. Holt has addressed these issues at length elsewhere, and interested readers are referred to his *Problem of Freedom*.

Unlike Holt, who emphasizes ideology in explaining the trajectory of Jamaican emancipation policy, Rebecca J. Scott places labor at the center of her analysis in her contribution, "Fault Lines, Color Lines, and Party Lines: Race, Labor, and Collective Action in Louisiana and Cuba, 1862-1912." With sugar production as the common denominator between southern Louisiana and Cuba, Scott investigates the complex relationship between politics and race, finding that, in both cases, coalitions of landowners and politicians invoked a simplified, black-white racial binary to crush multi-ethnic challenges. However, both the challenges and reactions took very different courses, so that, by the twentieth century the two societies "diverged radically," with Louisiana sugar workers "silenced" politically, and Cuban sugar workers acting as a "pivotal group in their nation's history" (pp. 63-64).

Although Cuba and Louisiana were both technologically sophisticated producers of sugar, their postemancipation labor regimes assumed very different forms. In Louisiana, wage labor eventually prevailed on the plantations, despite efforts by former slaves to increase their autonomy through alternate forms of labor. (Here Scott differs somewhat with work published subsequently by John C. Rodrigue emphasizing the flexibility of

wage labor for Louisiana freedpeople.)[7] In addition, the vast majority of Louisiana sugar workers were people of color, with a few of the whites occupying privileged positions as cane-growing tenants, all of which contributed to the conflating of "negro" with "laborer." In Cuba, which had an ethnically diverse labor force consisting of Chinese and Spanish immigrants, as well as of Afro-Cubans of all colors, the system of cane-production was reorganized. After emancipation was completed in 1886, Cuban producers increasingly turned toward a system of massive central mills supplied under contract by smaller landholdings, which reduced the independence of smallholders of all colors. As a result, Cuban wage laborers, tenants, and smallholders were more likely than their Louisiana counterparts to form cross-ethnic alliances (p. 101).

In addition to differences in labor, Louisiana and Cuba had different systems of race. Although historically Louisiana had by no means operated according to the same black-white binary that ruled elsewhere in the American South, the system was still not as fluid as Cuba's. As Scott points out, this history enabled planters to pursue a "White-Line" electoral strategy during the 1870s to squelch black political aspirations, and in 1887 they managed to crush a Knights of Labor-supported strike in the bayou country by playing to crude racism. By the turn of the century, white Democrats in Louisiana had solidified the new order through a series of election "reforms." The drawing of a sharp color line, which may have approximated the division of labor in the cane fields but flew in the face of both Louisiana history and lived experience, made it all possible.

In contrast, Cuban society was not refracted into simple categories of black and white. A broad continuum of color, class, and other categories situated Cubans in relation to one another. The result was broad cross-racial participation in the two major conflicts of the era. During the Ten Years War (1868-78), Spain responded to a moder-

ate independence movement by taking steps to end slavery, a gambit intended to win the support of enslaved Afro-Cubans. Many slaves pursued their own agenda and joined the conflict, one result of which was the inauguration of an apprenticeship period that ended slavery once and for all in 1886. In the second conflict, the War for Independence (1895-98), large numbers of former slaves, most of them workers on cane farms and at central sugar mills, enlisted under the banner of independence, with groups of laborers forming their own units. The rebel army also featured a number of leaders of color, most famously General Antonio Maceo. Although the revolutionary potential of the war was scotched by the U.S. intervention, Afro-Cubans managed to translate their participation in the independence struggle into something tangible: a constitution containing no color restrictions on voting, passed in 1901. But as in Louisiana and Jamaica, meaningful citizenship for former slaves was soon violently rescinded. In 1912 the Cuban army killed between 2,000 and 6,000 members of the Partido Independiente de Color, a group whose efforts to promote a racial political consciousness among black and mulatto Cubans threatened the political dominance of Cuban landowners. Although it was no longer possible to organize along explicitly racial lines after 1912, Scott argues that cross-racial alliances "continued to hold force in a growing labor movement" (p. 104).

Scott's essay engages with an extensive literature on race in the United States and Latin America, which often points in different directions, depending on how explicit the comparison is. When viewed side by side, the dualistic black-white color line of the United States, even in places like Louisiana, contrasts sharply with the more variegated marking systems of Latin America. Earlier scholars largely accepted the notion that distinctions of color did not matter in Cuba, unwittingly repeating one of the ruling elite's justifications for suppressing the Partido Independiente de Color. Scott steers clear of such over-simplifications, ac-

knowledging both the importance of, and the differences between, racial ideologies in Cuba and Louisiana. But when viewed outside the context of explicit comparison with the United States, Cuban racial discourse appears more prominent and more crude than Scott gives it credit for. Shockingly racist images, rivaling the worst in the United States, were common in the Cuban media at the turn of the century.[8]

In the end, Scott's inquiry into the linkages between labor, race, and political action yields fascinating insights, and I believe her emphasis on the differences between Louisiana and Cuba is correct. At the same time that emphasis may also have been conditioned by the decision to write an explicitly comparative study. It is also worth mentioning that Scott, in contrasting Afro-Cubans' role as a "pivotal group in their nation's history" with black Louisianians' political "silence," discounts both more subtle forms of political activity ("in-frapolitics," in the words of James C. Scott) and more overt forms, such as the participation of 24,000 black Louisianians in the Union Army during the Civil War.[9]

Frederick Cooper's "Conditions Analogous to Slavery: Imperialism and Free Labor Ideology in Africa" charts the repeated failures of European powers to impose their vision of the "universal worker" on their colonial subjects. Central to this process, argues Cooper, was the rhetoric of the antislavery movement. But in this case antislavery rhetoric did not articulate with themes of citizenship, as had been the case in Jamaica before 1849, but with the notion that "traditional" African societies needed to be prevented from practicing slavery. The 1884-85 Berlin Conference, at which the European powers drew the boundaries of empire in Africa, deplored the slave trade and obligated participants to take antislavery measures in their colonies. For most, "antislavery" translated into halting the trade in slaves, which happened fairly quickly.

However, efforts to eradicate slavery itself and impose a European-style free labor system on Africa were soon frustrated by the colonizers' own contradictory impulses. On the one hand, they desired colonial produce; on the other hand, conditions in many areas allowed potential wage laborers to fashion a quasi-independent existence through casual labor in urban areas and informal tenancy arrangements that bordered upon squatting, all of which cut into profits and revenues. Colonial administrators dealt with the problem by winking at slavery, as long as it was not too obvious. At the same time, they fetishized slavery as a paramount evil, defining it so narrowly as to permit other varieties of coerced labor, either through debt or by contracting out excess military conscripts to colonists. By the 1920s European administrators had abandoned the notion that Africans could be molded into good wage workers and justified their tolerance of coerced labor by portraying Africans as natural peasants, unhabituated to steady work.

The early twentieth century saw renewed criticism of coercive labor, beginning with the denunciation of the abuses of Belgian King Leopold in Congo and continuing through the resolutions of the League of Nations (1926) and the International Labour Organisation's Forced Labour Convention (1930). While raising the possibility that "conditions analogous to slavery" might eventually be addressed, the single-minded focus on slavery, argues Cooper, actually legitimized colonial rule because it "focused on a bounded evil, contrasted to the benign appearance of market transactions" (p. 130). Not until after the Second World War did these conditions come in for sustained condemnation, not by Europeans, but by Africans.

In the case of French Africa, which receives the most detailed attention, the abolition of forced labor came about largely through the efforts of Felix Houphouët-Boigny, who received the support of African cocoa planters in the Ivory Coast. In 1944 a group of planters organized their own

labor recruitment network based on a form of share tenancy. Their efforts were successful, and in 1946 Houphouet-Boigny was elected to the legislature in Paris, where he drafted and passed a bill ending forced labor. Indispensable to his success was enfranchisement and the eventual redefinition of colonial subjects into citizens of the republic, a successful fusing of citizenship and labor that had eluded Jamaicans a century earlier.

Ironically, the effort to modernize imperialism had failed, at least from the perspective of the metropole. Merely extending liberal citizenship to the colonies did not necessarily mean it would be adopted in whole. It might be tactically useful, but a number of thinkers rejected the homogenizing implications of being "equal" French citizens. The latter argument, of course, would be the basis of anticolonialism, making conflicts over labor a handmaiden of sorts to the eventual African liberation movements. Just as the effort to mold Africans into universal workers had backfired, so had the effort to make them into universal citizens.

Cooper's essay is expertly conceived and executed, with his deft management of the relationship between metropolitan ideas and colonial realities standing out as the piece's most impressive quality. From the perspective of a non-specialist, it would have been interesting to see more attention paid to the potential for exploitation on the part of some of the African planters who supported Houphouet-Boigny and helped to end forced labor in French Africa. Tenancy of the sort outlined here could easily entail exploitation and a lack of autonomy, or "conditions analogous of slavery," as most Southern historians are well aware. It is also possible that the creation of the tenant system was a shrewd play to garner labor as much as it was a humanitarian effort. Whether African planters were exploitative or not, discussion of what lay beyond "beyond slavery" would have added another intriguing layer to the analysis.

Beyond Slavery is no primer or textbook. Its thrust is decidedly interpretive, with the authors generally presuming some prior knowledge of events and chronology. However, readers unfamiliar with basic events in one or more of the locales need not turn away -- the authors provide enough factual material to orient non-specialists. Taken together, the three superb essays in *Beyond Slavery* are indispensable to anyone interested in slavery, emancipation, or labor history.

Notes

[1]. The literature is far too extensive even to give representative titles here. Readers are directed to Steven Mintz, *Slavery and Antislavery: A Bibliography of Works in English*, <http://vi.uh.edu/pages/mintz/bib1.htm>.

[2]. Other important works include those published by the journal *Slavery and Abolition*. See especially Sylvia Frey and Betty Wood, eds., *From Slavery to Emancipation in the Atlantic World* (London: Frank Cass, 1999).

[3]. James M. McPherson, *Ordeal By Fire: The Civil War*, 2nd ed. (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1992); David Herbert Donald, Jean Harvey Baker, and Michael F. Holt, *The Civil War and Reconstruction* (New York, W. W. Norton, 2001) mentions the slave trade and the existence of slavery in Brazil, Cuba, and Puerto Rico, as well as the Ostend Manifesto, but not the process of emancipation.

[4]. Luis A. Perez, *The War of 1898: The United States and Cuba in History and Historiography* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1998).

[5]. Thomas C. Holt, *The Problem of Freedom: Race, Labor, and Politics in Jamaica and Britain, 1832-1938* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1992).

[6]. On the concept of a public sphere, see Jurgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society*, trans. Thomas Burger with the

assistance of Frederick Lawrence (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1991).

[7]. John C. Rodrigue, *Reconstruction in the Cane Fields: From Slavery to Free Labor in Louisiana's Sugar Parishes, 1862-1880* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2001).

[8]. Aline Helg, *Our Rightful Share: The Afro-Cuban Struggle for Equality, 1886-1912* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1997).

[9]. Ira Berlin, Barbara J. Fields, Steven F. Miller, Joseph P. Reidy, and Leslie S. Rowland, *Slaves No More: Three Essays on Emancipation and the Civil War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), p. 203.

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Citation: Sean Kelley. Review of Cooper, Frederick; Holt, Thomas C.; Scott, Rebecca J. *Beyond Slavery: Explorations of Race, Labor, and Citizenship in Postemancipation Societies*. H-South, H-Net Reviews. September, 2003.

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