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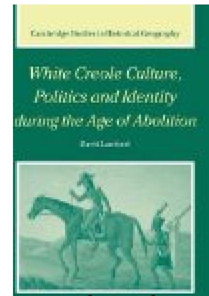
David Lambert. *White Creole Culture, Politics and Identity during the Age of Abolition.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005. viii + 245 pp. $75.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-521-84131-3.



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In 1787, British subjects established the Society for Effecting the Abolition of the Slave Trade. In 1833, the British Parliament passed an imperial act of emancipation. Examining the era between these two important dates, David Lambert, lecturer of human geography at Royal Holloway, University of London, analyzes the ways in which metropolitan and colonial Englishmen argued for and against the practice of enslavement during the Age of Abolition. The cultural construction of race is the focus of *White Creole Culture, Politics and Identity during the Age of Abolition.* More specifically, Lambert analyses what he calls the "war of representation," or the politics of articulating what it meant to be white within the transatlantic context of the British Empire stretching from metropolitan England to the colony of Barbados (p. 2). After a series of five chronological case studies, Lambert successfully demonstrates how the controversy over slavery and the concept of "whiteness" was not confined to British West Indian colonies, but rather an empire-wide debate with global ramifications.

Lambert, in trying to understand the politics of identity construction, combines several approaches to the study of history, culture, and geography. First, he wants to engage whiteness studies and postcolonial theory in order to understand how the meaning of whiteness changed as abolitionist Englishmen and Barbadian people of color pressured white colonists to reconsider their proslavery position within the British Empire. Second, he wants to situate the process of articulating whiteness within the context of Atlantic world studies linking Europe, Africa, and the Americas. Slavery, though, is the prism through which all of Lambert's actors articulate and counter-articulate racial and national identities, both for themselves and others. The idea of the "geographical imagination" is especially important to Lambert's conceptualization of how the status of West Indian plantation colonies appeared in the minds of all peoples of all colors in the British Empire. Barbados is Lambert's chosen place of study, as opposed to a more widely studied Jamaica, because of its position as the premier sugar-based British colony, composed of a wealthy planter elite and a relatively stable white population that made it similar to the slave society of the American South.

In his first two case studies, Lambert explains how the ideological boundaries of race and slavery developed at the start of the Age of Abolition. He begins his analysis by focusing on the arrival of Joshua Steele at Barbados in 1780 and his role in implementing a "rational" approach to the management of slave plantations that ceased use of the whip and endorsed the payment and tenancy of enslaved persons. His ideas would serve as a model for later reformers like Thomas Clarkson, but, more immediately, local planters opposed Steele's ideas and actively sought to diminish his influence in the West Indies. Lambert concludes that Steele's "rational" system posed such a great contrast to the planter ideal of mutual dependency and "natural" amelioration that it was not until the nineteenth century that abolitionism started to gain ground in Barbados (p. 65). In his second case study, entitled "Making a 'Well Constituted Society': The Ambitions and Limits of White Unity," Lambert tests the ability of white planters to gain popular support for their opposition to metropolitan-derived abolitionism. The problem for white slaveholders, according to Lambert, consisted of two "liminal" or in-between groups–poor whites and free people of color–and whether or not the "social/symbolic hierarchy" of Barbados would be based on race or class. "That is to say," Lambert clarifies, "should society be organised around the control of enslaved labour, whatever the racial type of the enslavers, or should whiteness be

the basis of social authority, whatever the class or slave-owning status of the whites" (p. 75)? In the end, the planter elite tried desperately to define a "well constituted society" along racial lines, thus requiring that "subaltern whites" be conceived as important to colonial order and free people of color be conceived as a threat to colonial order (p. 91).

In the next two case studies, Lambert describes the process of "creolisation" in white Barbadian society from 1816 to 1833. He starts in 1816 for a very obvious reason; it was the year of the largest slave rebellion in Barbadian colonial history. A coalition of enslaved elites and free people of color managed to incite a revolt that affected significant portions of the island. After halting the revolt and killing several hundred accused participants, a "war of representation" ensued between abolitionists and proslavery activists over the purity of white people, the status of Barbados as "Little England," and the extent to which white colonial identity was creole (p. 107). Central to Lambert's conclusion is the fact that "enslaved black people were actively involved in contesting articulations of colonial whiteness" (p. 139). This "war of representation" continued into the 1820s when proslavery Barbadians persecuted Methodist missionaries for disrupting their desired colonial order based on a hierarchy of race. Here, Lambert agrees with Gordon Lewis's characterization of Caribbean society as "Anglo-Saxon and anti-English" (quoted, p. 142), thus highlighting "an uncertainty about the place of white Barbadian society within the imaginative geographies of the British empire" (p. 142). In the end, at least for elite planters, to be anti-abolitionist was to be anti-Methodist.

To conclude, Lambert elaborates upon the "end of the world" as white planters knew it, that is, as a place based on the subjugation of non-whites and the elevation of white superiority. To demonstrate the ways in which white ideas about freedom changed at the end of slavery, Lambert looks closely at the events surrounding the 1831 "Great Hurricane" and a high-profile 1832 rape case. In both instances, white colonists interpreted the actions of enslaved persons as proof of what life would be like after emancipation. "As in the American South," Lambert insists, "white freedom ... was manifested in Barbados by the seemingly paradoxical emphasis on 'liberty' in white culture and in complaints that the imposition of emancipation would 'enslave' the slaveholders" (p. 176). Black freedom, on the other hand, took on apocalyptic proportions and signaled the end of the world, an end that at least legally occurred in 1833.

Lambert's *White Creole Culture, Politics and Identity during the Age of Abolition* is not a book for the casual reader of colonial history. Its sophistication, though difficult at times to manage, nonetheless lends insight to those interested in the cultural politics of identity construction that found articulation in four primary discourses: white supremacism, the planter ideal, colonial loyalty, and colonial opposition (p. 208). It is also helpful for those readers interested in the application of postcolonial theory to an ample assortment of primary sources within the contexts of regional and transnational studies of the West Indies. In the end, Lambert has made an important contribution to the understanding of "the geographical 'problem of slavery,' " a topic that David Brion Davis so eloquently introduced to so many historians and that Lambert has continued to develop even further (p. 10).

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