

Richard Follett, Sven Beckert, Peter Coclanis, Barbara Hahn. *Plantation Kingdom: The American South and Its Global Commodities*. The Marcus Cunliffe Lecture Series. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2016. 176 pp. \$49.95, cloth, ISBN 978-1-4214-1939-8.

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Plantation Kingdom is a concise presentation of some of the best recent scholarship in agricultural history. The contributors to this short volume use the stories of four crops—rice, cotton, sugar, and tobacco—to explain the origins, expansion, and decline of the slave plantation in the American South. For scholars and students, the book will be a valuable introduction to the agricultural systems that shaped southern history. The authors draw extensively on their previous publications in these essays, and readers seeking a detailed critique of their arguments should consult reviews of their principle monographs: Peter Coclanis's *Shadow of a Dream: Economic Life and Death in the South Carolina Low Country, 1670-1920* (1989), Sven Beckert's *Empire of Cotton: A Global History* (2014), Richard Follett's *The Sugar Masters: Planters and Slaves in Louisiana's Cane World, 1820-1860* (2005), and Barbara Hahn's *Making Tobacco Bright: Creating an American Commodity, 1617-1937* (2011).

Of the four crops examined in the book, two were grown widely across the South: cotton and tobacco. While the slave plantation developed in the colonial period to produce tobacco, sugar, rice, and other commodities, Beckert argues that cotton became the driving force behind the westward expansion of agriculture in the South and that cotton

planters controlled the vast majority of the antebellum South's enslaved labor. Hahn spends little time discussing slavery and the dynamics of the plantation agriculture, but her essay charts wide regional variations in tobacco production and change over time. Paradoxically, these two plantation crops were also ideal smallholder crops, due to low capital requirements, and the authors show how the production of both cotton and tobacco changed after emancipation.

Rice and sugar were geographically bounded and were more deeply dependent on plantation organization. Coclanis demonstrates how planters used tidal rivers as an irrigation technology, allowing for high rice yields. Those who owned this rare land grew exceptionally rich on the labor of their slaves. Sugarcane was similarly limited by shortages of suitable land, as well as by temperature. Follett's essay shows that the sugar planters of Louisiana, like their rice-growing colleagues on the Atlantic coast, could solve many problems by investing in more slaves (and in the case of sugar, machines). The end of slavery thus forced changes in the plantation system: the rice industry, already strained by global competition, entered a precipitous decline after emancipation. Sugar planters survived longer, in part because they were able to

evolve and could control and intimidate the new wage labor force.

The ways in which plants and environments shaped human behavior, and vice versa, are examined throughout the book. Follett maintains that a new variety of sugarcane introduced in the 1830s was pivotal in the expansion of sugar outside Louisiana; new plants gave some cotton planters an opportunity to switch crops. Hahn's essay is perhaps the best example of humans shaping plants, showing how different ways of growing, harvesting, and processing the same tobacco plant led to a range of commodity forms, creating an illusion of different regional cultivars. As the essays make clear, environmental conditions shaped the slave plantation system, but there was nothing about the geography of the South or the botany of these plants that demanded slave labor. Competition from non-plantation producers outside the South is a key theme across the book. Plantation crops initially flourished under colonial and national protection but eventually entered "commodity hell" as their specialty products became generic commodities, competing with producers around the world. Plantation rice and sugar quickly succumbed, and by the twentieth century tobacco and even cotton faced increasing competition in the world market.

Environmental historians will find the book useful as an introduction to southern agricultural history, exploring the economic, political, and environmental factors that influenced plantation agriculture. The book could serve in place of several monographs in the classroom, thanks to its broad coverage and manageable length. Unfortunately Beckert's essay is the only one with a chart. More figures and maps would have helped novice readers grasp the scale of the "plantation kingdom" and its evolution over time. The book is well suited to upper-level courses in a wide range of subjects, though the chronology of the book may pose a challenge for classroom use in lower-level courses: most of the book is focused on the dec-

ades leading up to the American Civil War and its immediate aftermath, but the essays range as far back as the seventeenth century and as far forward as the 1930s. Scholars who are familiar with the authors' previously published work will still benefit from the international perspective taken in these essays, and they will find much new material, especially in Coclanis's chapter.

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