

CAPITALISM AND SLAVERY 75 YEARS LATER

DR. HEATHER CATEAU

DEAN, FACULTY OF HUMANITIES AND EDUCATION

THE UNIVERSITY OF THE WEST INDIES, ST. AUGUSTINE CAMPUS

NOVEMBER 14, 2019

NEW INTRODUCTION BY COLIN A. PALMER

Capitalism & Slavery



Eric Williams



HISTORICALLY SIGNIFICANT THEMES:

1. **ORIGINS** OF ENSLAVEMENT

2. THE **PROFITABILITY** OF ENSLAVEMENT

3. THE **REAL CAUSES** OF THE **END** OF THE ENSLAVEMENT SYSTEM

CONTEMPORARY SIGNIFICANCE



1. EXPANSION OF PROFITABILITY THEME
2. REPARATIONS MOVEMENT
3. RECENT DEVELOPMENTS IN THE U.S. HAS REVERTED SCHOLARSHIP
TO THE IDEAS IN *CAPITALISM AND SLAVERY*
4. DECOLONIZATION OF OUR SCHOLARSHIP
5. COMMEMORATION – PARTNERING OF ACADEMICS WORLDWIDE
6. PSYCHOLOGICAL IMPORTANCE

ARE THERE LESSONS TO BE LEARNT FROM THE TEXT *CAPITALISM AND SLAVERY* IN THIS THE 75TH ANN. OF ITS PUBLICATION?

- WRITTEN IN 1944
- PHILOSOPHICAL BASE REFLECTS THE KEY MOVEMENTS OF THE
TIME:
 - ❖ DECOLONIZATION
 - ❖ INDEPENDENCE

BASIC ARGUMENTS OF CAPITALISM AND SLAVERY

❖ TEXT WAS BASED ON THEORETICAL FOUNDATION BEST DESCRIBED AS **ECONOMIC**

DETERMINISM

❖ WILLIAMS FOCUSED ON THE BRITISH WEST INDIES IN EXPLORING THREE MAIN THEMES:

1. ORIGIN OF ENSLAVEMENT → ECONOMIC FACTORS
2. ENSLAVEMENT → PROFITABILITY → INDUSTRIAL REV. IN BRITAIN
3. END OF ENSLAVEMENT SYSTEM → ECONOMIC FACTORS AT THE ROOT EMANCIPATION
FROM ABOVE OR EMANCIPATION FROM BELOW – BUT EMANCIPATION

WILLIAMS' CAUSES OF PROFITABILITY

1. ENSLAVED LABOUR
2. MONOPOLY AND MERCANTILISM
3. THE TRIANGULAR TRADE





WILLIAMS' CAUSES OF DECLINE

1. RISE OF THE ECONOMIC PHILOSOPHY OF CAPITALISM, FREE TRADE & FREE LABOUR
2. INDUSTRIALIZATION AND NEW ECONOMIC PRINCIPLES

WILLIAMS' CAUSES OF EMANCIPATION

1. CHANGED OR “NEW” ECONOMIC CONTEXT
2. INCREASING VOLATILITY IN THE COLONIES



OTHER FACTORS TO CONSIDER (1788-1834)

1. THE ANTISLAVERY SOCIETY AND THE ABOLITIONISTS:
WILBERFORCE, CLARKSON, STEPHENS, BUXTON AND
WOMEN SUCH AS ELIZABETH PEASE AND ELIZABETH
HEYRICK
2. ROLE OF THE BRITISH MASSES (ATTENDING MEETINGS AND
SIGNING PETITIONS)

ANOTHER PERSPECTIVE PAINTED BY WILLIAMS

1. HE QUESTIONED THE TIMING OF THESE EVENTS. WHY DID IT NOT TAKE PLACE WHEN SUGAR WAS KING?
2. WHO ARE THESE PEOPLE WE CALL ABOLITIONISTS?
 - ✓ THEY SUPPORTED FREE TRADE
 - ✓ THEY WERE THE NEW CAPITALISTS
 - ✓ THEY WERE THE RISING ECONOMIC ELITE
 - ❖ **ABOLITION WOULD CREATE THE ENVIRONMENT IN WHICH THEY WOULD PROSPER**
 - ❖ **THE LEADERS OF THE ANTISLAVERY SOCIETIES WERE THE POLITICAL REPRESENTATIVES FOR NEWLY INDUSTRIALIZED AREAS**

THUS, DID ABOLITIONISTS REALLY OPERATE SOLELY ON THE BASIS OF “HUMANITARIAN FACTORS”?



GETTING BACK TO 2019

- **GLOBALIZATION:**
 - ❖ THE REACH OF ENSLAVEMENT CONTINUES TO EXPAND.
 - ❖ SCHOLARSHIP IS EXPANDING THE COUNTRIES AND THE PEOPLE WHO WE NOW KNOW WERE DIRECTLY INVOLVED
- **REPARATIONS:**
 - ❖ AS THE REPARATIONS MOVEMENT GROWS, THE THESES IN *CAPITALISM AND SLAVERY* FIRST ELABORATED IN 1944, ARE DIRECTLY RELEVANT



GETTING BACK TO 2019

- **COMMEMORATION:**
 - ❖ IN 2019, THE 75TH ANN. OF THE PUBLICATION OF THE TEXT HAS BEEN COMMEMORATED AT:
 1. BOCAS LIT FEST
 2. UNIVERSITY OF LONDON
 3. UNIVERSITY OF LIVERPOOL

THERE ARE PLANS FOR:

1. A SPECIAL PANEL IN GUADELOUPE
2. A SYMPOSIUM AT THE UNIVERSITY OF OXFORD

CAPITALISM AND SLAVERY: THE DEVELOPMENT OF CARIBBEAN SCHOLARSHIP

❖ CAPITALISM AND SLAVERY → WRITTEN BY A TRINBAGONIAN

❖ ONE OF THE FIRST TEXTS WRITTEN FROM A CARIBBEAN PERSPECTIVE
WITH NO APOLOGIES



PSYCHOLOGICAL IMPORTANCE



- TOOL OF CARIBBEAN EMPOWERMENT
- THE TEXT AS AN EXAMPLE OF THE DIFFERENCE YOU CAN MAKE
- IF WE DON'T ADD OUR VOICES TO THE RESEARCH, THE SCHOLARSHIP AND TO CHANGING BIASED ONE SIDED HISTORY:
 - ✓ WE WILL UNDERVALUE OUR CONTRIBUTION TO THE WORLD
 - ✓ WE WILL NOT TRANSFORM
 - ✓ WE WILL NOT BE TRULY FREE OR INDEPENDENT