
more circumspect about Rockefeller's for profit ventures, that included a fish company, dairy projects, farms, and a food distribution company, which ran into economic problems and were not always culturally attuned to the needs of Venezuelan farmers.

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JEAN BESSON: *Martha Brae's Two Histories: European Expansion and Culture-building in Jamaica*. Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2002.

Jean Besson's monograph, *Martha Brae's Two Histories: European Expansion and Culture-building in Jamaica*, is a welcome addition to Caribbean studies by an anthropologist whose seminal articles have been foundational to the study of the region for a generation of social scientists.

Besson, a Jamaican anthropologist teaching at Goldsmiths College at the University of London, has devoted three decades of meticulous fieldwork to the rural areas of Trelawny parish on Jamaica's northern coast. The fruits of her labors are reflected in this book, which presents a richly-textured and multi-faceted portrait of Jamaican village life over two centuries. Like Sidney Mintz, the American anthropologist who wrote the forward, Besson is a very historically-minded anthropologist, as interested in economic processes and political context as she is in family organization and kinship. Her work relies on at least three methodologies –ethnography, oral history and archival research– which she handles with great fluency and effectiveness. Such a multi-faceted approach is required for her purpose, which is nothing less than the reconstruction of two centuries of peasant existence in a hamlet on Jamaica's north coast. Such a reconstruction, in its typicality, can serve as illustrative of agrarian life for subaltern classes throughout the Anglophone Caribbean.

The challenges that lie in the way of such a task are many and exist on at least two levels. In the first place, Caribbean territories like Jamaica were developed to produce sugar with slave labor, and so traditional historical sources tend to contain more material on the plantation system than on peasant cultivation. Yet the peasant side of the Jamaican economy was not only significant in material terms, but vastly important in cultural ways as well. The process of cultural mixing and transformation known as creolization, that has come to define West Indian identity, could never have happened without the existence

of a vibrant peasant community in which were reconstituted and reconfigured aspects of African tradition. It is here that Besson's multi-disciplinary approach is indispensable.

An even more intractable difficulty arises when attempting to assess the implicit role that cultural context inevitably plays in determining the form of historical representation. Besson confronts this issue head-on in the introduction, where she includes an interesting summary of her own family history, which, with its complex mix of lineage, class and ethnicity, aptly encapsulates the ambiguities of traditional, especially North American or European, social categories in the West Indian context. Besson's portrait of Jamaican peasant life is comprehensive, covering gender relations, work patterns, kinship networks and, most significantly, patterns of land tenure. Her overarching aim is to generate a model of Caribbean culture-building, or creolization, that exemplifies a process of ideological contestation between planter elite and peasant subaltern, whereby European institutional structures and practices were "appropriated and overturned by African American slaves and their descendants" (9). At the very core of her analysis is a remarkable consideration of land tenure systems, and Besson traces the way in which traditional European understandings of land rights and their transmission, primarily through primogeniture and male succession, become transformed by Afro-Caribbean peasantry into a "system of unrestricted cognatic descent." This is a significant contribution, as it extends the outer boundaries of the creolization thesis articulated by Price and Mintz, insisting that the post-slavery era saw the persistence of land tenure systems that recognized the claims of "illegitimate" as well as female offspring, rather than simply those of the eldest legitimate male heir. Besson even documents cases where smallholders used the formal apparatus of the law to guarantee that offspring unrecognized by the courts could inherit land –a telling instance of elite structures having their ideological purposes reversed.

Besson's articulation of property concepts with constructions of gender also allows her to make wider comments about the role of women in the generation of subaltern Jamaican culture. Not only did women play a role in redefining ideas of property relations, but they played a vital economic role by dominating the internal marketing system of the island. This allowed them to "channel flows of information and mobilize political action" (16). By documenting instances of female participation in the construction of folk identity, Besson challenges one of the "gatekeeping concepts" of Caribbean Studies, adumbrated by Peter Wilson a generation ago. In his seminal work, *Crab Antics: The Social Anthropology of English-Speaking Negro Societies of the Caribbean* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1973), Wilson established a conceptual polarity between male behavior, sprung from folk traditions and aimed at equality and

independence, on the one hand, with Euro-centered female behavior aimed at preserving hierarchy and order. Wilson typified male attitudes as promoting “reputation” among other men, while he described female attitudes as being directed towards the attainment of “respectability.” Besson’s book gives example after example of the ways in which “women as well as men have been prominent in Caribbean culture-building and development since slavery days” (18).

Her book can be highly recommended as a unique contribution to Caribbean Studies, offering a most detailed and persuasive case for the process by which currents of Old World cultural elements became fused and transformed in a New World Context. At a time when creolization tends to be used in highly abstract ways, Besson’s portrait of the Jamaican hamlet of Martha Brae provides deep empirical content and historical context for an important but elusive process.

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STUART F. VOSS: *Latin America in the Middle Period, 1750-1929*.
Wilmington, DE: Scholarly Resources, 2002.

Stuart Voss set himself an ambitious task in this book: to reconceptualize, in the vein of recent scholarship, the common binary periodization of Latin American history. Most textbooks and curricula divide the historical experience of Latin America at the Wars of Independence in the early nineteenth century. Along with Mark Szuchman and many others, Voss proposes instead a three-part periodization with a middle period that marks the transition from colonial to modern Latin America. Unlike most other scholars, whose middle period begins in the mid-1700s and ends in the mid-1800s, the author conceives of a “long nineteenth century” from circa 1750 to the Great Depression of 1929. In this middle period, Voss argues, “certain colonial developments came to fruition, principally the maturation of largely autonomous regional societies. At the same time, the possibilities for the formation of national modernizing societies were created...” (xi). Thus, the tripartite division of Latin American history rests on a spatial perspective in which historical periods are defined by degrees of regional, national, and global integration in cultural, economic, and political terms. The middle period can thus also be called the age of the region.