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Source: *The Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute*, Vol. 2, No. 2 (Jun., 1996), pp. 289-311

Published by: Royal Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland

Stable URL: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/3034097>

Accessed: 03-02-2019 16:45 UTC

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ENDURING SUBSTANCES, TRYING THEORIES: THE CARIBBEAN REGION AS *OIKOUMENÊ**

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The Caribbean region was only laggardly assimilated into cultural anthropological research, since its cultures differed so markedly from regnant conceptions of the proper anthropological subject. As the first part of the non-Western world to endure an era of intensive Westernizing activity, the Caribbean *oikoumenê* became 'modern' in some ways even before Europe itself; while the history of the region has lent to it a coherence not so much cultural as sociological. Today's scholars have begun to look to the Caribbean for concepts they can use in describing the globalization process. But their results are mixed, in part because they continue to treat the region's distinctive history too lightly.

Introduction

While preparing this article I discovered that Thomas Henry Huxley had been the inaugural speaker on September 12, 1876, at a ceremony to mark the formal opening of Johns Hopkins University, the institution with which I am affiliated. The times were violent, and the United States was in the throes of wrenching change. The nation was still invigorated (but also deeply divided) by the Union's victory in the War of Secession, which had ended scarcely a decade earlier. Huxley's visit barely preceded the formal undoing of the Reconstruction movement in the American South and the consolidation of state and local control of a terroristic sort over Black freed persons there. After only a similarly brief period his visit to America was followed by Gen. George Armstrong Custer's defeat at the Battle of the Little Big Horn, in the last attempt by North American Indian peoples to defend their land militarily against the European invaders.¹ Hence Huxley arrived during a prolonged epoch of national turmoil, involving both the Native American and African American peoples of the United States.

Though Thomas Jefferson had called for 'a natural history of the races of black and of red men' almost a century earlier (Mark 1980: 5), there was still not much anthropology being done at the time of Huxley's visit. The so-called 'primitives' lived figuratively – in many cases literally – at our back doors. But few white Americans made any systematic attempts to understand them, let alone to contemplate whether they might one day become equal citizens in a single society.² Studies of Native Americans, pioneered by such figures as Albert Gallatin and Lewis Henry Morgan, became more orderly when the Bureau of

* Huxley Memorial Lecture 1994

J. Roy. anthrop. Inst. (N.S.) 2, 289-311

American Ethnology took shape under the direction of Major John Wesley Powell, three years after Huxley's visit, in 1879. But the anthropological study of African Americans would remain of minimal interest, at least to white scholars, for another half century.³ Still, a profound difference between the history of our discipline in Europe, on the one hand, and in the Western Hemisphere on the other, inheres in the simple fact that our subjects of study, our 'primitive' peoples, were our neighbours – our ill-treated, indeed often persecuted, neighbours. In this instance as in others, the anthropology we do and have done is conditioned by the history and social complexion of the society whence we come.⁴

I begin in this manner simply to call attention again to the well-known fact that our science has always been moulded by particular historical, social and political contexts. As these contexts change, so do our understandings of what anthropology is; and so does its *raison d'être*. One way of looking at the history of the field is in terms of its development by a series of steps or stages related to world events, which affected the consciousness of our predecessors in a particular manner, thereby redefining at least the ethnological components of our disciplinary horizons. During its first century, anthropology began to elaborate clear distinctions among what came to be its several parts: archaeology, physical anthropology, linguistics and ethnology (later, social anthropology in Britain and cultural anthropology in the United States). Such divisions were created and enlarged upon in a different manner in the New and Old Worlds, but they remained recognizable at least until after the second world war.

For those anthropologists concerned with living peoples, the discipline had also settled (if not entirely comfortably) upon a definition of subject-matter better described, I think, by exclusion than otherwise. People who had writing, machines to make machines, or were European, for example, were not proper subjects. Of the various bases for including or excluding a society from properly anthropological study, the criterion of technological achievement seems to have been most important. Hunters and gleaners, peoples who had no domestic animals and no horticulture, were probably the most satisfactorily 'primitive'. In large measure theirs were small societies, their material culture modest, their kinship arrangements the larger basis for their social relationships; they lacked machines or any elaborate political institutions, and they were nonliterate.⁵ There seemed to be little reason to doubt that they were our kinds of people – I mean, our kinds of people to treat as an object of study. The lines were somewhat more difficult to draw in the case of large, more complex polities, especially those with an elaborate agriculture, such as the societies of much of West Africa. But there, too, the lack of writing and of advanced machine technology was usually sufficient for us to perceive them as 'ours'.

That these two criteria, technology and writing, should have figured so importantly made a certain sort of brutal sense; underlying all the other distinctions was the abiding political and economic domination of the West, resting upon its military superiority. In a famous passage, Lévi-Strauss put it this way:

Anthropology is not a dispassionate science like astronomy, which springs from the contemplation of things at a distance. It is the outcome of a historical process which has made the larger part of mankind subservient to the other, and during which millions of innocent human beings have had their resources plundered and their institutions and beliefs destroyed, whilst they themselves were ruthlessly killed, thrown into bondage and contaminated by diseases they were unable to resist. Anthropology is daughter to this era of violence; its capacity to

assess more objectively the facts relating to the human condition reflect, on the epistemological level, a state of affairs in which one part of mankind treated the other as object (Lévi-Strauss 1966: 124).

Evolutionary views of the social history of the species, as exemplified (though quite differently) in the work of Tylor and Morgan, employed certain technical features such as ceramics and writing as markers of progressive achievement. But there were inconsistencies; no one knew quite what to do with those peoples whose societies had behind them recognized millennia of 'civilization' – particularly as expressed in literacy – yet were considered otherwise unworthy of being accorded status equal to that of the societies from which the anthropologists themselves had come.

It seems to me that on this account there really emerged three constructed categories of society. There was our defined subject, the 'real' non-literates or primitives. There was also the category in which we ourselves were central, sometimes called 'civilization' and referred to these days as 'the West'. Finally, there were those ancient great societies whose experiences with such things as writing, states and other diagnostic traits composing the armamentarium of civilization were long – in several embarrassing instances, even as long as, if not longer than, our own.

I take note of these familiar matters, in what is only a preface to my subject, in order to renew attention to the ways in which we have tended to conceive of, and classify, the world in its many divisions. The evolutionary sequences implied in such categories had a historical aspect, inasmuch as they were thought to reflect a movement from small to large, technically limited to technically advanced, *communitas* to *societas*, nonliteracy to literacy, *Gemeinschaft* to *Gesellschaft*, and so on. In important ways such an evolutionary conception seems to me irrefutable. But these sequences were not the histories of particular single and real societies; it was the stages that were treated as real. Indeed, it is specifically to the non-historicity of such anthropological categories that I wish to direct attention.

Before the second world war, few scholars raised seriously the issue of whether the anthropological research focused upon so-called 'simple' societies might be fruitfully extended to other societies of different sorts.⁶ One of the first such undertakings, which took the form of a large-scale co-operative venture, was the so-called 'Puerto Rico Project', initiated by the late Julian H. Steward, then of Columbia University.

Although physical anthropology, archaeology, linguistics and folklore already had had long and respectable histories in the Caribbean region, the project set in motion by Steward was a first of its kind (Steward *et al.* 1956). It began only a few years before Fortes's student, Raymond T. Smith, and Forde's student, Michael G. Smith, initiated their own researches, respectively, in then-British Guiana (R. Smith 1956), and in Jamaica, Grenada and Carriacou (M. Smith 1956; 1962; 1965). These undertakings by students of three distinguished scholars represented separate extensions of social and cultural anthropological interest to what was, ethnographically speaking, an ambiguous region at the time. That each was sponsored by a leading contemporary anthropological authority probably had much to do with the relatively favourable (if sometimes grudging) manner in which such initiatives were received and evaluated. By

these studies, the Caribbean region was made part of the anthropological world on terms other than those defined by its aboriginal past. Of this, I will want to say more.

Culture-area and oikoumenê

'The one proper foundation of all broader studies in ethnology as in history', wrote Alfred Kroeber, the Huxley Memorial Lecturer for 1945, 'is the precise, intimate, long-continued examination of the culture of an area or period' (Kroeber 1946: 9). Believing as I do that Kroeber's vision of ethnology offered anthropology a mission that is still consistent with the discipline's past and humankind's future, I will try to apply it here to one small portion of the earth's surface. To do so, I must advert to Kroeber's own view of the ways that place and culture are conjoined.

Since the line between 'primitive' and 'civilized' was first put in doubt, it has become a commonplace that peoples, cultures and regions must be examined anew in terms of their particular histories, not in terms of the sketchy theoretical devices employed to divide them into ambiguous categories (such as 'primitive' and 'civilized', or folk and urban). The point is certainly not that all theory is bad. It is, rather, that the lifeways of all of the peoples we study are forever subject to influences from elsewhere, and are forever in flux – that they are historical products, processual products, such that most categories and continua run the risk of immobilizing and misrepresenting them. Kroeber writes: 'a cultural fact is always a historical fact; and its most immediate understanding, and usually the fullest understanding of it to which we can attain, is a historical one' (Kroeber 1948: 253-5).⁷ I shall contend the same here. The question then becomes one of which kinds of categories can serve useful classificatory anthropological purposes. To address that issue, I wish to turn to the concept of the culture area, on which much early ethnological description and analysis once turned.

Boas argued that the culture-area idea arose first in connexion with museological needs, as concepts of geographical unity surpassed older evolutionary notions of how best to exhibit material culture. In the United States, it was probably Mason who first used the culture area in his written work, referring indifferently to both 'culture area' and 'ethnic environment' (1895; 1907; but see also Farrand 1904). Sapir considered the culture-area concept to be a generally-accepted device for the classification of American Indian life when he wrote his famous paper on time perspective in aboriginal North America (Sapir 1916). A year later, Wissler used the same idea, though he spoke first of 'food areas', upon which his culture areas were superimposed (Wissler 1917; 1923; 1926). In such constructs, a geographically bounded surface was formulated according to physiographic and subsistence facts, then by the distribution within it of distinguishable groups which, while politically distinct, nonetheless exhibited most of the cultural institutions and material accompaniments that could be used to define them collectively. So, for instance, the Plains culture area of North America covered groups which hunted bison from horseback, used the tipi and dog travois, had a sun dance ceremony, lacked agriculture, basketry and pottery, and so on; while the Northwest Coast region was inhabited

by folk who subsisted on marine life, lived in wooden houses, were governed by hereditary chiefs, held potlatches, and the like.

More or less explicitly, the culture area was sometimes accompanied by a sister concept, the age-area, which embodied the idea of a centre where the typical cultural forms were more heavily represented. There was solid interest in, and much evidence marshalled for, the idea that breadth of spread was correlated with ancientness of pattern; and that diffusion, rather than independent invention, explained most of the distribution of traits. The culture area was not merely an explanatory and display convenience. In the form of age-area, it was often employed to infer or to imply historical processes.

We now know well, and in a general way, what it is we do not like about such concepts. But one of the best critics of the culture area formulation (Kroeber 1931) also tried to improve upon it in various publications (Kroeber 1925; 1939; 1944; 1946). In his encyclopaedic *Configurations of culture growth* (1944), a book that practically nobody reads any more, Kroeber made a brilliant effort to breathe life into the concept. There, he was concerned with the patterning, both in time and in space, of the cultural content of civilization. He advanced beyond the trait-counting so typical of culture-area studies, in order to elaborate in more sophisticated fashion the idea of the age-area. This concept is readily traceable at least back to Boas's teacher, Ratzel (1891), and the Danish archaeologist, Müller (1907).⁸ In his 1945 Huxley Lecture, Kroeber went furthest in changing the culture area into the *oikoumenê*.

That term has now been revived.⁹ In its original form, *oikoumenê* was used to refer to the inhabited world as the Greeks defined it. Kroeber probably first borrowed the term from Ratzel (1891) to apply it to certain specific world regions, which he viewed as set apart from the rest by the growth of distinctive cultural syntheses. In his own words, the *oikoumenê* constituted:

a great historic unit ... a frame within which a particular combination of processes happened to achieve certain unique results ... an interwoven set of happenings and products which are significant equally for the culture historian and for the theoretical anthropologist (Kroeber 1946: 9).

Kroeber's Huxley Lecture reapplied this ancient concept, invented by the Greeks for their world, to what he viewed as the 'civilized world' at large. His intention was to suggest how cultural forces made that world one, as certain aesthetic and technical achievements spread successively through a series of adjoining geographical zones, linking them culturally. Elsewhere, he says he has in mind 'the history of all civilization seen as an intricately connected single whole, gradually coming to cover the main landmass of our planet' (1952: 331). It is mostly in this latter, almost prophetic usage that the term (now more commonly written 'ecumene') has returned to currency, as part of an evolving interest in conceptions of globalizing cultural processes. Here, I intend to employ the word in its older meaning of 'a great historic unit ... a frame within which a particular combination of processes happened to achieve certain unique results', with attention to Kroeber's phrase about 'an interwoven set of happenings and products'.

The Caribbean oikoumenê

I feel required to set my usage of the term *oikoumenê* apart from Kroeber's. Any *cultural* uniformity or commonality of the Caribbean region, of the sort that scholars such as Mason, Wissler and Kroeber had associated with the culture area concept when it was first developed, would become dilapidated by 1550, and disappear almost entirely by 1650. In spite of considerable Quincentenary puffery, indigenous Caribbean resistance to the Spaniards was in fact divided and sporadic. Except for the Lowland Maya area, long deserted by the end of the fifteenth century, and the Central Plateau of Mexico, remote from the Caribbean Sea, there were no large or densely populated societies abutting on the region.¹⁰ Circumnavigation, exploration and conquest of the islands was largely the work of the Spaniards. As early as the mid-sixteenth century, a vertiginous population decline had set in among the insular aboriginal peoples. Hence when Northern Europe first challenged Spanish Caribbean hegemony head-on in the second quarter of the seventeenth century, they fought mostly for lands, including islands, that had already been conquered, depopulated by disease, war and hard labour, and partly resettled from elsewhere.¹¹

Spain's initial imperial intentions were metallurgically extractive and religiously proselytizing. Though it was she who brought enslaved Africans, the plantation form and the sugarcane plant to the Antilles, relatively little came of it during the initial 125 years of nearly exclusive Spanish rule. But Northern Europe, beginning around 1625, came to the region to produce staples for rapidly expanding metropolitan markets. Both indentured and stolen fellow citizens and impressed and enslaved Indians were used by the North European colonists as labour, but their *fons gentium* for New World plantation slavery would be Africa. From the first half of the sixteenth century to the second half of the nineteenth, the Caribbean region, consisting of these oldest colonies of the West,¹² received perhaps one-third of all enslaved Africans who reached the New World alive. The region's inflow of European migrants never approached in numbers that colossal tide of manacled Africans, an irregular but unceasing current stretching over nearly four hundred years. The significance of these events, which began half a millennium ago, is sometimes passed over too lightly, even by modern specialists in colonialism. After the mid-nineteenth century and well into the twentieth, yet another wave of migrants, this time of coerced and semi-coerced Asians, reached Caribbean shores, marking a new stage in the development – to borrow Frank's (1966) phrase – of underdevelopment. I have referred before to these human tides as among the most massive demographic and acculturational phenomena in world history. The time scale matters; they were over by the time Victoria was crowned empress of India, and mostly before West Africa became colonial. Otherwise said, they were early in European imperialist history.

Labour was imported primarily to work on plantations which, over time, produced sugar, molasses, rum, tobacco, cotton, indigo, coffee and other staples for European consumer markets. After the ending of the slave trade, and then of slavery, these enterprises were partly readapted to produce bananas, coconuts, pineapples, nutmeg and these days (though not quite on a plantation scale) marijuana. The eastward flow of such staples, under way by the second decade of the sixteenth century, has never wholly ceased. These various agricultural

products, these enduring substances, epitomize what was at first a newly-fashioned overseas merging of production and processing, of field and factory; and the twinning of colony and metropolis, producer and consumer, European and Other, slave and proletarian, field hand and factory worker, colonial subject and citizen.

Such serial exploitation of Native American land and African and Asian labour was not the work of any single colonial power. Many competing European states, vying militarily for territory and economically for markets, were deeply involved in the establishment of colonies, the creation of plantations and the construction of the necessary colonial, administrative and commercial institutions that would breathe life into new dependencies. In the Caribbean region, and after the Spaniards, the pioneers included the Dutch, English, French, Swedes, Danes and, last but not least, North Americans.¹³ All of them found the Antilles of intense interest, though not all at the same time, nor always for exactly the same reasons.

The plantations, agro-industrial enterprises vital to the reshaping of both food habits and forms of leisure of massive urban European populations, were landmark experiments in modernity. Plantation labour was mostly organized on a crew or gang basis, and not much by individual talent. Workers were disciplined to work interchangeably, and by the clock. Caribbean industry was thought of as simple, since most of its labour over time was enslaved, and it was typified by few skilled categories, meagre artisanry, and seemingly uncomplicated industrial processes. Yet it was complex in so far as the unity of field and factory was an unvarying essential of labour efficiency. The system required overarching supervision to ensure that time schedules were met¹⁴ – and in the case of sugar-cane, the most important crop, those were dictated by the characteristics of the plant itself. Sugar-cane must be cut quickly when its sucrose content is highest; it must be ground as soon as it is cut, so that it does not lose that sugar; its juice must be heated quickly, prepared for crystallization and ‘struck’ – emptied into the coolers – at exactly the right moment. The water- and wind-powered factories were enormous mechanical devices for their times, and it took several men to operate even the initial animal-powered mills used by the sugar-making pioneers of Santo Domingo in the early sixteenth century. The large-scale use of furnaces and vessels was typical. Even steam was adopted very early in the evolution of the sugar industry, before the end of slavery in the case of several Caribbean societies (Hagelberg 1983; Mintz 1985). These technical features, many tied to careful timing, introduced more than just an aura of industrial modernity into what were operations which predated, in many cases by whole centuries, the Industrial Revolution.

Modernity has to do not only with the organization of industry, but also with the effects of such organization upon the labour force. Keep in mind whence, how widely, and under what conditions most such plantation labour was ‘re-cruited’. Accordingly, ‘modernity’ refers here to a learned openness to cultural variety, an openness not so much relativistic as non-valuative – an openness which includes the expectation of cultural differences, and is not shocked by them. Said in today’s tormented language, the modernization of Caribbean people took place in the constant presence of multicultural Others. People who come from different places and who are not *in* their own culture can become modern, in part because institutional recourse to a standard common tradition

is not immediately available. Soon after the Conquest, Caribbean people began coming from somewhere else. Most of them had to come with imperfect institutions, and in the company of others culturally unlike themselves. Most came without kinfolk. That was also modernizing, because the minimal cells of tradition-perpetuation are familial.

From the sixteenth to the nineteenth centuries, Caribbean plantation labourers became adept at forming relationships quickly, especially dyadic relationships. Because the basis for operating in terms of known status categories was under constant pressure from migration and external coercion, they had to learn to deal socially with others, often in the absence of culturally-specific preconceptions about the meanings of individual differences in age, gender or physical variety. Accordingly, 'modernity' as used here refers not only to the technological accompaniments to industry, but also to its social organizational sequelae: to the circumstances for meeting and relating; to ways of socializing without recourse to previously learned forms; to an acquired matter-of-factness about cultural differences and differences in social style or manners; and to a social detachment that can come from being subject – while recognizing one's own relative lack of power – to rapid, radical, uncontrolled and ongoing change.

The processes set in motion by the creation of the New World plantations have never stopped. But in their earliest overseas phases, they were concentrated within a definable area, of which the relatively tiny Caribbean colonies were a part.¹⁵ It was what these reborn enterprises¹⁶ achieved in mobilizing resources, adapting to stolen labour, producing capitalism's first real commodities, feeding the first proletarians, and changing the outlooks of so many people on both sides of the Atlantic, that embodied a dawning modernity.

By the mid-nineteenth century, however, when the industrial modernity of the European world had become fully established, the Caribbean region had entered into a lengthy economic eclipse, as other areas, especially in Asia and Africa, were drawn into homologous relationships with Europe. As North American power filled in spaces created by declining European commitment to the Caribbean, the relationship of the region to the world outside changed radically.¹⁷ The 'modernization' stopped; as the Caribbean's definition as a key economic area declined, what had once been modern soon came to seem archaic. Caribbean people, having taken on identities radically different from those they had as newly-impressed, newly-enslaved or newly-transported persons, had been building ways of life of their own. I contend that they were incorporating into those new lifeways attitudes about individuality, about the nature of human relations and about the significance of cultural differences that marked them off, and still mark them off, from their contemporaries elsewhere. A 'particular combination of processes', 'an interwoven set of happenings and products', to use the words of Kroeber I quoted earlier, were indeed achieving certain unique results.

The Caribbean today is commonly viewed as a region within which generalized European cultural forms have jostled each other over time, intermingling with materials diffusing from other Old World areas and with those left over from the remnants of indigenous New World cultures. But we cannot safely treat those Europeans as representing some undifferentiated 'Western' cultural tradition. Whether we think of language or law or cuisine (or some more

impalpable segment of culture, such as the values expressed in courtship, sexual attitudes, marriage or parental behaviour), the societies of the Caribbean are differentiated not only internally in terms of class, ethnicity and other criteria, but also cross-culturally. Haiti and Cuba are equally Caribbean societies, as are Barbados and Suriname. But the similarities between any two, or among the four of them, are not, properly speaking, cultural in nature. What language (or languages) are spoken by their people; where the sons of the middle classes are sent to be educated; whether they also send their daughters; how they cope with the issue of race, legally and socially; how they regard their former imperial rulers, in terms of their readiness to adopt relevant cultural forms – none of the answers to such questions is precisely the same for all of these societies. The Caribbean, in other words, is not a culture area.

And yet I believe that the Caribbean *oikoumenê* is real. Its reality inheres in its history as subject to the founding intentions of the European powers: the outlook of those who created overseas plantation colonies, and the colonial regimes and coercive labour systems they devised, put in place, fought to retain and, when necessary, readapted in order to achieve their objectives. That is, the *oikoumenê* acquired its integrity partly as a consequence of the imperial intentions of its rulers, even though those rulers, taken together, represented different cultures with different ideologies. This highly differentiated European imperial undertaking involved both the coercive systems that governed local initiative throughout the region, and the cultural origins of Caribbean peoples, the bulk of whom were not European in origin.

The basis for constructing a Caribbean *oikoumenê*, then, lies with the social frameworks created for culturally diverse migrant peoples who were subjected to centuries-long processes of mostly forced cultural change by European rulers; and with the long-term effects of those processes upon Caribbean life. It has nothing to do with language or food or dress or like cultural indices *as such*, but with a transmuted vision of the world itself, engrafted upon countless strangers, who came or were brought to the region over centuries, replacing those who had died or who had been killed off by disease, war and European imperial enterprise.

Literally millions of people, drawn from many different societies, were thrust into situations where their labour power was the only important consideration about them, so far as those who contracted for them or who bought them were concerned. They were obliged to create wholly remodelled cultural systems by which to live, and to do so while working long days at exhausting labour on agro-industrial enterprises large and technically efficient enough to be extraordinary for their time. Whatever might have been judged 'primitive' about those newcomers, in the anthropological measure of things, soon became something else. Whatever their cultures might have been, they were, by the very processes of impressment and forced culture change, made in some ways much more alike. The transplanted peoples of the Caribbean had to be homogenized in some ways to meet the economic demands imposed upon them, at the same time that they were being individualized by the erasure of the institutional underpinnings of their pasts (Mintz 1974). These were among the achievements – if we choose to call them that – of Caribbean colonialism.

The movements of people by which such sweeping changes were facilitated were massive, mostly coerced, and extended over centuries. I do not think that there is much with which they can be compared, in previous or subsequent world history. Those who came in chains could bring little with them. The conditions under which they had then to create and recreate institutions for their own use were unimaginably taxing. This was, of course, particularly the situation for those who came as slaves. It was different, and somewhat better, for impressed or contracted Europeans. But the Irish deported by Cromwell, the convicts and *engagés*, the debt and indentured servants from Britain and France, cannot be said to have been truly much better off, so far as the transfer of kin groups, community norms or material culture are concerned. Nor, for that matter, were the Chinese who would be shipped to Cuba, the Indians who went to the Guianas and Trinidad, or the Javanese who went to Suriname, in subsequent centuries.¹⁸ When the legal systems of slavery were reluctantly dismantled, their institutional fabric was lovingly preserved. The end of slavery did not put a halt to slavery's habitual social and economic accompaniments. Given those continuities, I think it likely that the human communities created upon the Caribbean landscape between the sixteenth century and modern times were – at least in the scale on which they took shape – the only ones of their sort in world history.

The enterprises for which these people were carried across oceans were intimately associated with Europe and its growth. Their development was an instance of a precocious modernity, an unanticipated (indeed unnoticed) modernity – unnoticed especially, perhaps, because it was happening in the colonies before it happened in the metropolises, and happening to people most of whom were forcibly stolen from the worlds outside the West. No one imagined that such people would become 'modern' – since there was no such thing; no one recognized that the raw, outpost societies into which such people were thrust might become the first of their kind.

Such processes of cultural stripping and rebuilding awe us less in today's world. But it seems likely that few, if any, Europeans in the Caribbean of the seventeenth or eighteenth centuries understood in these terms what was happening to the slaves. They were interested in the slaves' failure to become Europeanized, which they simply read as failure; they were interested in little else about them, except how they worked and how else they might be a source of profit.

I have stressed here that European conquest did not make the Caribbean region into anything resembling a conventional culture area, in the older Wisslerian sense, since half a dozen culturally different nations were engaged in the colonial enterprise, installing and perpetuating distinctive traditions in language, law and all else. They did so in large measure by employing the two institutions referred to here, the plantation system and slavery. In effect, technically modern means of production, epitomized by heavy machinery and the joining of factory and field, were manned using archaic, coercive labour forms, in the earliest large overseas colonies that Europe would create.¹⁹ In time this very institutional assemblage, combining estate and bondage, endowed the people who were imported pell-mell to man it, with fundamental common experiences and understandings; and the human effects of those experiences

clearly transcended the cultural differences which came to distinguish one colony from another. The slaves of Jamaica might not have been able to speak to the slaves of St Domingue in the same language; yet their separate experiences were enough alike to afford them an outlook, common in some particulars, that has never been entirely obliterated.

The slaves' failure to become entirely Europeanized, which was read simply as failure by most Europeans, was also linked to their differing cultural origins. Though cultural practices of ultimately African provenience do not everywhere assume the same form or play the same role, certain widely-shared orientations stemming from the African past are common in the region. But this assertion has to do with differences in cultural origin, not with processes of culture-building. Over the course of centuries, the near-total destruction by colonial rulers of older mechanisms of social reproduction in the Caribbean region had as its consequence the establishment of autonomous traditions by local people.²⁰ This emergent cultural autonomy did not reveal itself in a vacuum. That is, the history of the Caribbean has been almost entirely a *colonial* history; there is no way to approach the European, African and Asian pasts of contemporary Caribbean peoples without trying to understand their historical experience. That experience, while rich in materials of African origin, survives only in transmuted forms, which differ locally in their importance, their distribution and their substantive content. The ceremonial associations attached to death, and the roles of the dead; basic aesthetic and formal conceptions in graphics, music and folklore; and the place of social conflict in explaining illness and misfortune, are examples of cultural materials in which the African past figures (Mintz & Price 1992). Such materials must lead us to the past experiences of the people who live them today; there is no other way truly to understand how they came to take on their contemporary form.²¹ Through that history we come to grasp why it is that Puerto Rican cane cutters and Jamaican cane cutters for example, would have no difficulty finding common ground in regard to many subjects, even though lacking a common language.²² That shared knowledge originates in the historical experience of the colonial past.

Recent thinking about Afro-American culture history has not gone quite far enough to deal with what is shared, and what distinctive, in these ways. Gilroy (1993), for instance, has written in terms of the Black Atlantic, thereby installing the history of the victims where it belongs – inside the evolution of European capitalism (as well as inside the evolution of Western thought). But the 'Atlantic system', after all, has figured in the thinking of North American historians for more than two decades.²³ What was new – and it began with C.L.R. James – was pointing out how much of that system was Black. Beyond this widest dimension, Gilroy himself has not grasped those distinctions which inflected a hemispheric Afro-America both historically and geographically. When he writes that the experiences of the Black diaspora have 'created a unique body of reflections on modernity and its discontents' (1993: 45), he ignores the historically-shaped differences within that body which make the thought of Black Brazilians, Jamaicans, Haitians, Cubans and North Americans (for instance) different enough from each other to raise the question whether there is any single body to that uniqueness.

The differences internal to hemispheric Afro-America are truly vast. Garvey's Afrocentric appeals were heard by the North American urban Black masses, not by DuBois and Washington; Rastafarianism has not won adherents among Black intellectuals anywhere. North American Afrocentricity today has a mass appeal, but moves few intellectuals. Little of the preceding has any significance at all for Haitians or Cubans or Brazilians. Such differences in response reflect fundamental historical, cultural and self-referential differences that complicate any integral vision of a Black Atlantic.²⁴ Caribbean cultures, born of those early European experiments with the fates and futures of millions of Others, were forged more by the victims than by the masters, and took on their distinctive stamp before much of the rest of the non-European world had even become colonial.

The uses of the Caribbean oikoumenê

The last decade has seen an astonishing surge of interest within anthropology in what can be called globalization theory. Such theory explores how the international movements of capital, commodities, information and people have increasingly surmounted or eluded state control; the ever more worrisome challenges posed for customs officials, immigration authorities, banking systems, censors, patent offices and other sentinels of the state by massive new pressures at the borders; the soaring emigration of domestic servants, small-scale retailers, prostitutes and factory workers, which has kept pace with rising levels of cheap air travel; the fluctuating conceptions and realities of state power; and the changing contemporary meanings of place, region and nation. What Clifford has called 'the old localizing strategies – by bounded *community*, by organic *culture*, by *region*, by *center* and *periphery*' – he now argues may 'obscure as much as they reveal' (Clifford 1994: 303). Words such as diaspora, transnational, ecumene (*oikoumenê*) and hybridity are increasingly employed in a lexicon created in large measure to deal with what is thought to be a qualitatively new epoch in world cultural history.

Conceptions of culture as no longer tied to a particular group of people, or to a particular locus – of culture as a matter of degree, as much as of kind – have become more common in response to new conditions. At the same time, some scholars have dredged up older terms, which they feel they can apply in these transmuted circumstances. For a Caribbeanist, it is striking to discover how often such terms are associated with, or have been borrowed from, the Caribbean region and its history. 'Transculturation', to take one example, was first coined by the Cuban scholar Ortiz (1947) and blessed by none other than Malinowski in 1939. Another, 'creolization', a truly ancient Caribbean term, is now being applied elsewhere and, indeed, is treated as emblematic of what is said to be happening to the world as a whole. Even the term '*marronnage*', desertion by slaves, by no means so common even in the Caribbean (though what it stands for is widely recognized there), is now being applied in other contexts. The term 'Caribbean' itself is enjoying great metaphorical popularity.²⁵ Hence, though the Caribbean region only came tardily to anthropological attention as an ethnographic research locus, it is proving to be increasingly popular as a source of terminology, and even of some theoretical ideas, in recent decades.

The term 'creolization' can serve as an illustration. In his superb *Amerikanisches Wörterbuch*, Friederici notes how much the definition of the term *criollo* ('creole') has varied with place and time; he restricts himself primarily to three meanings:

- 1) everything born in the New World of Old World parents is creole; hence there are white creoles and black creoles and creole animals, but not creole Indians;
- 2) children of pure *reinblütiger* parents, born in America; *criollo* is that person who is the child of Spanish parents, born in America or, as Arona put it: 'the word *criollo*, which designates the American, but of pure European origin'; and
- 3) in the first phase of the Portuguese colonization of Brazil, those African coloured [*Farbigen*], whether introduced or born locally, were called *crioulos* indiscriminately, in contrast to the Portuguese, Brazilians and Mamalukes [here, this last term meaning mestizos of *non-African* origin] (Friederici 1960: 219-20; author's translation).

Of these (and other) meanings, the first is most useful to us. The term itself comes from a Romance verb root meaning 'to raise' or 'to bring up'; today the noun 'creole' usually means something of the Old World, born in the New. It has recently been reapplied to processes occurring elsewhere, as in contemporary Africa and, more generally, to modernization itself (Clifford 1988; Hannerz 1992a; 1992b). The variety of meanings to which it had given rise before its rediscovery by globalization experts is not surprising, since in its application to the Antilles, it is a descriptive term at least 400 years old *in print*. José de Acosta, in his *Historia Natural* (1590), used it but once: 'creoles, as they call those born of Spanish parents in the Indies' (Friederici 1960: 220). Garcilaso de la Vega, in 1602, writes: 'and so, the Spaniard as well as the Guinean [African], born there [in the New World], are called criollos and criollas' (Friederici 1960: 219). Endless similar citations could be added.

It will be immediately apparent that Caribbean creolization began five centuries past, with migration and resettlement, forced transportation, the stripping of kinship and community, the growth of individuality on a new basis, and the appearance of the first true creoles – things of the Old World, born in the New. But exactly because terms were lacking to describe new and complex processes of intermarriage and informal union, the mixing of cultures and peoples, and the variegated social structures of the New World as they evolved, such terms acquired many different meanings. Arrom (1954) discussed the problem of creolization in an early paper; there exists an enormous pre-1990 literature on creolization, which is simply not referred to at all by many scholars who are now using the term.

The term 'creolization' is mostly used now in some linguistic sense. Even though it has created some subsidiary problems, the linguistic analogy for creolization is particularly appealing. Its popularity may be due in part to the supposition that linguistics is an exact science when compared with cultural anthropology. In any event, the way that linguists have dealt with the varieties of linguistic merging and interpenetration characteristic of the evolution of creole languages has appeal. But language is not culture, only a part of culture; it is not organized 'just like culture', but differently; and the linguistic model of creolization is a model for languages, not a homology with culture itself.²⁶ Creole languages have been a serious subject of linguistic study for little more than half a century (datable, perhaps, from Reinecke 1938). In contrast, the serious observation of creolization as a process of cultural change involving

multicultural masses of people goes back centuries in the Caribbean region. Cultural creolization was a subject of study in the Caribbean just because it had such distinctive sociological characteristics of its own.

Today, some processual features of the modern world appear to mimic or to resonate with the Caribbean past, so the term 'creolization' is now reinvoked.²⁷ These cultural processes involve movement, change and rooting anew. Their study is now thought to throw much light on the modern world. Though many of the people who were subject to the original processes of creolization were – among other things, and with their children – manacled for life, the ways in which cultural material was lost, reclaimed, patched together or invented is seen as having shared much with what observers think they see in contemporary events.

But as Friederici's definitions make clear, creolization as an original process had to do not just with the loss of culture, but also with some sort of *indigenization*, since the descendants of people from elsewhere became culturally different from those who came before – that is, from their parents and grandparents. Culturally, they were busily becoming their own persons. This involved the refashioning of cultural materials from more than one source, materials being transmuted into a remarkable *tertium quid*, neither African nor Eurasian but American. Creolization did not average out, or marry neatly together, the parental cultures of European and African, Asian and Amerindian, planter and slave, nor did it involve the disappearance or negation of cultural forms. Creoles were people who moved beyond the cultural and conceptual confines of their migrant parents, and became, for better or for worse, hemispheric Americans of a new sort.

Thus the new concept of creolization has been borrowed from a geographically and chronologically specific New World setting, without serious attention to what the term meant, or to what historically specific processes it stood for. What typified creolization was not the fragmentation of culture and the destruction of the very concept, but the creation and construction of culture out of fragmented, violent and disjunct pasts. If what is thought to be happening now is the end of culture (like the end of history), then I suspect that the globalists may be at work in the wrong place.

Something of the same is probably true of the uses being made of the term *marronnage*, a French word borrowed from the Spanish term *cimarrón*. Its origins are in dispute, but not what the noun *marron* or *cimarrón* originally referred to: a runaway, particularly a runaway slave. Even so brief a review as that of *criollo* above is not possible for *marronnage*; but a short comment may be useful. In 1616, Pedro Ordóñez de Ceballos put *cimarrón* and *caribe* together for good political reasons: in those times in the Caribbean, the 'runaways' made common cause with the 'savages', as both sorts sought to stay both free and alive. But mostly *marronnage* came to refer to the semiferal, the escaped, the unbroken, *hombres y animales indómitos* – or, more simply, those the state could not control. From the term came the English 'maroon'; and the maroons of the Guianas, of Os Palmares, of Jamaica and Santo Domingo are familiar to any reader of Afro-American history. Not surprisingly, *maté* without sugar was called *maté cimarrón*, and wild tobacco was *tabaco cimarrón* – just as the piranha fish became the *pez caribe* and the hottest red pepper became *ají caribe* (Henríquez Ureña 1938). Words have, and reveal, *particular* histories. Though they can be semantically

evacuated to create social science abstractions, they usually lose their original meanings in the process.

In a paper on the Martiniquan poet Aimé Césaire, Clifford discusses how Césaire toys with the word *marron* in order to make a verb from it: *marronner*. Clifford argues for the universality of Césaire's poetry, and attaches it to what he has learned about the Caribbean. He writes:

The Caribbean history from which Césaire derives an inventive and tactical 'negritude' is a history of degradation, mimicry, violence, and blocked possibilities. It is also rebellious, syncretic, and creative. This kind of ambiguity keeps the planet's local futures uncertain and open. There is no master narrative that can reconcile the tragic, and comic plots of global cultural history (Clifford 1988: 15).

Here, a historically specific term linked to the centuries-long resistance of those people who would soon become culturally and demographically the people of the Caribbean is turned into 'global cultural history'. Students of Haiti will know, however, what the *nèg mawòn* (Fr. *nègre marron*) stands for in much more specific terms: Haiti's 'unknown soldier', emblematic not of contemporary global cultural history, but of how the slaves destroyed by force of arms the most profitable colony Western imperialism had so far created. It is of topical interest, perhaps, that in the Haitian creole language *mawònaj* has been used most recently to describe those who managed to escape from Cedras's thugs.

Students of globalization theory find concepts such as creolization and *marronnage* useful because they seem so well to fit modern conditions of migration and adaptation. But the modernity of the sixteenth-century Caribbean was unique. First, as I have sought to establish, it was industrially modern, predating Europe itself in this regard. But Europe soon became modern in that same way; its technical advance swiftly and irrevocably dwarfed and obscured the Caribbean case. Second, however, I have proposed that the sixteenth-century Caribbean became modern because of the experiences of its peoples. Quite unexpectedly, *they* became modern, too.

But while European industrial modernity emerged with amazing rapidity, the processes by which Caribbean peoples were made modern in centuries past presumably did not begin to show themselves massively in Europe itself until the last few decades. That Caribbean concepts such as creolization and *marronnage* seem to prove so timely for students of globalization is immediately referable to the fact that the Caribbean colonies were the first planetary colonies in world history (Konetzke 1946: 9). It is as if global *social* processes needed centuries to 'catch up' in the world at large to what Caribbean colonialism had done to its peoples, long ago. How entertaining, then, to think back to the recent past, when Caribbean anthropology was considered theoretically unfruitful precisely because its peoples supposedly lacked culture, or were culturally bastardized. *Horribile dictu*, anthropology had been caught napping, yet again.²⁸

Conclusions

I have contended that anthropology only turned to the study of other than so-called 'primitive' people in its most recent phase of growth, following the second world war. During this period, the Caribbean region became ethnographically interesting. But the study of societies and peoples of the Caribbean

kind had never been defined as outside anthropological interest, except for either romantic or snobbish reasons. Here is Kroeber again:

After all, the subject of anthropology is limited only by man. It is not restricted by time – it goes back into geology as far as man can be traced. It is not restricted by region but is world-wide in scope. It has specialized in primitives because no other science would seriously deal with them, but it has never renounced its intent to understand the high civilizations also. Anthropology is interested in what is most exotic in mankind but equally in ourselves, here, now, at home (Kroeber 1953: xiii).

The world, of course, has changed rapidly since those words were written. Not only is the Caribbean region now of anthropological interest, but every European and North American city of any size now has its Caribbean population as well. Globalization theory has developed in search of conceptual tools with which to comprehend and explain this new stage of world history, when the movement of ideas, commodities, capital and people through space and across borders threatens to change all of the rules by which international games were played.

To that new world condition, Caribbean peoples bring a modernity of their own, born in another era. Hobsbawm once called this region

a curious terrestrial space-station from which the fragments of various races, torn from the worlds of their ancestors and aware both of their origins and of the impossibility of returning to them, can watch the remainder of the world with unaccustomed detachment (Hobsbawm 1973: 8).

That unaccustomed detachment is not, however, uninterested or disinterested. It has helped to produce some of the more unusual political leaders of modern times, including (as of this writing) the only socialist head of state in the world; the former chairman of the American joint chiefs of staff; a few of the earth's best poets and novelists in English, French and Spanish; and two Nobel laureates, both from the tiny island of St Lucia.

Such achievements take on their special lustre when they are viewed in the perspective of the region's history, and the truly awful conditions, both material and spiritual, which its peoples have struggled to surmount for centuries. Anthropology should help us to understand this contradictory and decidedly non-primitive region – not so much as a part of the so-called Third World, but as the first part of the world outside the West to be annexed by the 'First', or European, World.

Near the beginning of her remarkable book, *Patterns of culture*, probably still the most-read anthropology text ever written, my teacher, Ruth Fulton Benedict, quotes at some length a Digger Indian chief named Ramon. Ramon was of interest to her because he perceived the culture of his own people as almost object-like – intact, unrepeatable and unique – and of a form then irrevocably shattered by change. 'Those things that have given significance to the life of his people', Benedict writes, '... were gone, and with them, the shape and meaning of their life' (1934: 19). Ramon's own words, which she quotes, corroborate her rendering. 'In the beginning', he told her, 'God gave to every people a cup, a cup of clay, and from this cup they drank their life. They all dipped in the water, but their cups were different. Our cup is broken now. It has passed away' (Benedict 1934: 19).²⁹ Consistent with the anthropological view of the time, that cultures vary in intactness and coherence – and with the usually unspoken belief within anthropology that coherence and intactness are inherently good³⁰ – Benedict used Ramon's story to make a statement about

cultural patterns, about whole cultures and coherent cultures. Her own preferences were clear, and even a certain contradictoriness in Ramon's own vision she managed to purge in her own.

What is striking about Caribbean cultures in the light of Ramon's story, as Benedict tells it, is not how remote they are from her view of what a fulfilling culture might best be for its citizens; it is, rather, that they have been remote in those very ways for centuries. That is, of course, why the anthropology of the 1930s could have had little interest in the Antilles. The ancestors of the people who live there came from all over; and they brought little with them. They had nothing: no polychrome ceramics, no blowguns, no plumed headdresses, no bifurcate merging. Their languages were, in the idiom of the time, hardly languages at all – *Sklavensprachen*, *petit-nègre*, *Kauderwelsch* – jargons, neither Indo-European nor anything else. Surely no civilization; but even more depressing, no convincing primitivism, either: no complex kinship, no elaborate ritual, no pristine *Gottesidee*. Alongside such force-fit, mongrel creations of empire, Zūfi culture or Samoan culture or Dobuan culture certainly must have looked fresh, internally consistent, dignified and romantic. As they must have been perceived at the time, Caribbean cultures represented a fourth category, alongside the genuinely 'primitive', the 'Western' and the archaic civilizations: these were the peoples without culture.

Recently I was impelled to think again about Benedict's Digger Indian friend Ramon's broken cup, while reading Derek Walcott's 1992 Nobel Lecture. The distinguished Caribbean poet and playwright seeks there to evoke for his listeners that distinctive quality of the region whence he comes. His imagery resonates with Ramon's. Here, too, there is a vessel; but this vessel is smashed.

'Break a vase', he begins:

and the love that reassembles the fragments is stronger than that love which took its symmetry for granted when it was whole. The glue that fits the pieces is the sealing of its original shape. It is such a love that reassembles our African and Asiatic fragments, the cracked heirlooms whose restoration shows its white scars. This gathering of broken pieces is the care and pain of the Antilles, and if the pieces are disparate, ill-fitting, they contain more pain than their original sculpture, those icons and sacred vessels taken for granted in their ancestral places. Antillean art is this restoration of our shattered histories, our shards of vocabulary, our archipelago becoming a synonym for pieces broken off from the original continent (Walcott 1992: 27).

One may easily read in these words the tragedy and the glory of Caribbean history. Writ small, it is the tragedy and glory of the encounter of the entire non-Western world with the West. But in the Caribbean case, it happened long before it did anywhere else, and under conditions that would prevent its awful novelty from being recognized for what it was: a modernity that predated the modern. If that is indeed the way the world is becoming, then Caribbean peoples already know about it. In their irrepressible spirit, Caribbean peoples may simply be telling us that there is hope for today's modernity, too.

NOTES

The writer is grateful to Talal Asad, Lanfranco Blanchetti, Raymond Firth, Jacqueline Mintz, Stephan Palmié, and Rebecca Scott for their generous assistance. Persisting errors of interpretation or fact are his responsibility alone.

¹ The Ghost Dance religion is sometimes thought to mark the end of armed resistance, with the so-called 'Sioux Uprising' of 1889. But in fact the killings at Wounded Knee were almost entirely of Indians by U.S. Cavalry troops, by a ratio of about 10:1. Many, perhaps most, of the Indians were women and children.

² Slavery turned out to be the morally indigestible reality of the eighteenth century – a reality on which every political economist who spoke of freedom had to gag. The Marquis de Condorcet, writing under the *nom de plume* of Joachim J. Schwartz, found slavery morally reprehensible; so did his contemporaries. But their dismay was always tempered by many considerations, not the least their estimates of the differing capacities of different 'kinds' of men.

Philip Mazzei, Jefferson's friend, noted that some Americans thought that selling the slaves to the plantation islands – in order to provide some indemnity for those who owned them on the mainland – was a solution. But most people, Mazzei included, thought that too cruel: 'The only men sent to the islands should be criminals condemned to death. The sentence would be less severe, but in their opinion worse than death' (Mazzei 1975: 345). This view may at least help us to understand better what contemporaries thought about slave life on the Caribbean islands at the time.

Summarizing Condorcet's thought, Mazzei tells us that 'It is a crime to tolerate an unjust law, but there are times when precautionary measures necessitate delays. It is a crime to deprive a man of his natural rights, but the Negro, like a child or an idiot, must be protected by society until he is capable of exercising them without doing harm to others or himself' (1975: 346-7).

³ It has been perhaps too little noticed how pivotal was the role played by Boas in bringing about the scientific study by anthropologists of Afro-American peoples. Dubois recounted how deeply he had been affected by Boas when, as a young history instructor, he heard him for the first time:

Franz Boas came to Atlanta University where I was teaching history in 1906 and said to a graduating class: You need not be ashamed of your African past: and then he recounted the history of black kingdoms south of the Sahara for a thousand years. I was too astonished to speak. All of this I had never heard and I came then and afterwards to realize how the silence and neglect of science can let truth utterly disappear or even be unconsciously distorted (DuBois 1939: 7; see also Hyatt 1985).

Boas vainly sought support from the Carnegie Corporation to create a museum and institute to deal with Afro-American peoples. His hope had been to establish a centre that could, among other activities, provide practical scientific counsel to the government on matters having to do with Afro-Americans. But his project was judged to be too radical by the Carnegie Corporation (Beardsley 1973: 61).

The studied neglect of W.E.B. DuBois' *Black folk then and now* by the academic community is another sign that white scholars were mostly uninterested in Afro-American history and culture.

⁴ In a highly entertaining account, Bourguignon recently described her first anthropological fieldwork as follows:

My own first experience in anthropological fieldwork, as a graduate student at Northwestern University, was with Indians. A group of us spent a summer on a reservation in Wisconsin. It was also tourist country, where many city people came to spend their vacations, to fish and boat or, in the fall, to hunt. We rented a house and settled in. There were no permissions required to carry on research, either from governmental agencies or a tribal council. We became acquainted with people and they talked to us. That was pretty much all there was to it ... This was in 1946 (1992: 30).

American anthropologists had been doing just that for well over a hundred years, but Europeans have never really had similar opportunities.

⁵ Thus, for example, the concise statement by Aberle (1951: 1): 'In conformity with current anthropological usage, *nonliterate society* will be used to refer to any society that lacked a system of writing prior to its contact with Western culture. The term *primitive society*, which is more common, has unfortunate connotations of "early", "backward", and often "prelogical".'

⁶ I do not mean to imply here that anthropologists disclaimed interest in 'non-primitive' peoples. Scholars such as Kroeber and Malinowski certainly regarded humanity in general as anthropology's proper subject. A textbook such as Firth's *Human types* (1938), contained discussions of American and South African racial discrimination; and Boas's research, much of it

based on work with recent immigrant populations to the U.S., was directly related to contemporary issues in modern society.

⁷ Lesser is eloquent on this argument:

We see such and such events going on. Many things are always happening at the same time, however. How are we to determine whether or not those things which happen at the same time are related to one another? For it is obvious that they may be contemporary events, or even serial events, not because they are related to one another but because their determinants, unknown and unobserved, have caused them to happen at the same or subsequent times. In short, contemporary or associated events may be merely coexistences. Culture, at any one time, is first and foremost a mass of coexistent events. If we are to attempt to define relationships between such events it is impossible in view of the known historicity of things, to assume that the relationships lie on the contemporary surface of events. Whatever occurs is determined more by events which happened prior to the occasion in question than by what can be observed contemporaneously with it. As soon as we turn to prior events for an understanding of events observed we are turning to history. History is no more than that. It is a utilization of the conditioning fact of historicity for the elucidation of seen events. (Lesser 1935: 392).

⁸ See especially Kroeber 1931.

⁹ See, for example, Hannerz 1992a; 1992b; and Kopytoff 1981. There is no agreement among modern users on what 'ecumene' means, however. Ratzel's original usage is quite clear: 'Das Verbreitungsgebiet der Menschheit nennen wir ökumene' (1921, I: 150).

¹⁰ The level of aboriginal agriculture on the big islands has led many scholars to attribute high populations to them. But great controversy continues concerning the aboriginal population of the Antilles. For the island of Hispaniola alone, most modern estimates have ranged from as low as 60,000 to as high as several millions. Henige (1978: 217-37) has argued convincingly that we will never be able to make any useful numerical estimates.

¹¹ Here is what Kroeber had to say about the Caribbean region (the 'West Indies') in the precontact era. It conforms neatly to the culture-content basis for the culture area concept:

In the West Indies, there was a backward aboriginal population, preagricultural, which survived in western Cuba until historical times. This was overrun by the Taino, coming from their Arawak kinsmen of the South American mainland ... who spread as far as the coral-reef Bahamas ... The peak of Taino culture was reached in the islands of Puerto Rico and Haiti, as shown by stone and shell carvings that are pleasingly modeled, even if scarcely constituting a distinguished art. At the time of discovery, the gentle Taino were being gradually conquered by the Carib ... who were more recently come from the South American mainland. The West Indians were the first native Americans to bear the brunt of Spanish impact and enslavement. They melted away enormously fast, and their culture is known only sketchily from eyewitness accounts (Kroeber 1948: 835).

Some younger scholars have discarded the tripartite classification of Caribbean aborigines; others, such as Rouse (1992), still retain it.

¹² Literary specialists in the postmodernist assault on colonialism do not all remember that the Battle of Plassey took place some 215 years after the discovery of the New World. Modern colonialism can arguably be said to have begun with Santo Domingo in 1492. Before then, we may refer to the Atlantic islands, such as the Canaries and Madeira, but little more – unless one chooses to go back to Amalfitan or Venetian colonies in the eastern Mediterranean. With New World colonies, the era of what Konezke fittingly labelled 'planetary empires' (1946) could begin.

Nor is the relative age of the colony the principal point. That colonial epoch which began with the Spanish conquest of Santo Domingo evolved in a world that was enormously different from what it would become by, say, the eighteenth century.

¹³ Both the Duchy of Courland and the Knights of Malta were interested in Caribbean possibilities, but could not develop them; so were the Welsers, who were active in Venezuela, but not the islands. The varying role of trade in the imperial designs of the European states was an important distinguishing feature among them. Except for the Hispanic Caribbean, however, most Europeans continued to think of home as being in Europe, and viewed at least ambivalently their identification with the islands.

¹⁴ The organization of processing, which sugarcane's natural characteristics imposed on the industry, was not ironclad, however. Both technology and landholding forms can modify the productive arrangements themselves, and this has become clearer since the nineteenth century.

Scott (1985) has pointed out that, at least in later stages of the evolution of the sugar plantation, centralized managerial control could sometimes be dispensed with. When cane was supplied to the mill by smaller-scale producers, the supply sectors were integrated by other means. In the Caribbean region such mills were called central factories (Sp. *central*). But such land-and-factory combines (Mintz 1956) are a relatively late development in the industry.

Different but analogous changes occurred in the Taiwanese sugar industry under Japanese rule; cf. Ka 1995.

¹⁵ The Guianas are usually included within the definition of the Caribbean, and they were large in area. But their role in the evolving sugar industry overall was small. The Hispanic islands only became important from the latter half of the eighteenth century. The 'classic' development of Caribbean sugar plantations occurred in the British and French insular colonies, c. 1650-1800.

¹⁶ Sugar was produced on the Atlantic islands of Portugal and Spain during the first half of the fifteenth century, and elsewhere (such as São Tomé, off the African coast) in the second half. New World plantations, however, represented a new and unimaginably larger-scale enterprise than anything which had preceded them.

¹⁷ I am not able here properly to consider the geopolitical implications of the nineteenth century, during which the Caribbean may be said to have changed from being a North European lake into a North American lake. 'Backwardness' and 'modernity' in the region have of course always been linked to wider economic and political forces. But the living centre of those external forces shifted significantly, with the dawn of North American (extranational) imperialism, beginning before the Civil War, when the South actively conjured with the idea of an American Caribbean.

¹⁸ The literature on these movements has become quite voluminous. In recent years, such works as Look Lai (1995) on the Chinese and Indians in the former British West Indies and Cuba Commission (1993) on the Chinese in Cuba.

¹⁹ It now is more widely accepted that Marx was never entirely satisfied with the manner in which he dealt with New World slavery in his treatment of the plantations. How slavery might be made to fit into the Marxist schema was a troublesome issue, which is made only more so by the assertion that the plantation economy was in certain ways modern for its time. The wider implications of these issues cannot be addressed here. See Mintz 1978.

²⁰ I am particularly grateful to Stephan Palmié for helping me to clarify this point.

²¹ The history of the perpetuation and spread of African cultural elements in the region differs not only from island to island, but also within populations, and an essay of this sort cannot deal with that variability. There have been certain attempts to describe these differences by reference to the predominant role of one or another African 'tribal' (e.g., Ashanti, Dahomey, Yoruba) group. A bulking problem is what to make of such materials for the seventeenth or eighteenth centuries. The African presence is probably better studied by an initial recognition that everything African in the Antilles had to pass through an American experience. Thoughtful, informed and imaginative attempts to explore some of these issues include Palmié in press; Price 1983; and Thornton 1992.

²² One might well ask whether some such understanding might typify their relation to, say, Philippine or Fijian cane cutters, as well. I think the answer would be both yes and no. That there exists some rural proletarian consciousness seems to me highly likely. But to look for sociological regularities without first grasping historically specific differences is to ignore the analytically most valuable way to draw comparisons.

²³ For instance, in Johns Hopkins University's Program in Atlantic History and Culture, which has been training graduate students in history and anthropology for more than twenty years.

²⁴ It is not surprising that a scholar of West Indian origin would advance so sweeping a conception; C.L.R. James had done it before. The very existence of the Caribbean – indeed, of the Blackness of the continent – means less to Afro-North Americans, exactly because they are so North American culturally. Caribbean people have a wholly different sense of Africa. Afro-North-Americans (as Afro-South-Americans would say) have more difficulty than Caribbean people in trading in the magic of Africa in their political formulations for the realities of four centuries of slavery and resistance.

²⁵ The word's origin, Carib (from Cariban *callinago*) is of course the same as for cannibal and Caliban. See Henríquez Ureña 1938.

²⁶ One of the most popular such borrowings comes from Drummond 1980. There, Guyanese culture is conceived of as a continuum along which more or less free-floating social forms can be accounted for by specifying the users sociologically.

Hannerz is more insouciant:

As languages have different dimensions such as grammar, phonology and lexicon, and as creole languages are formed as unique combinations and creations out of the interaction between languages in these various dimensions, so creole cultures come out of multidimensional cultural encounters and can put things together in new ways (1992a: 265).

²⁷ See, for example, Hannerz 1987a; 1987b; 1992a; 1992b; Miller 1994.

²⁸ One of today's leading scholars of the Caribbean region came to me in 1964 while I was a visiting professor at M.I.T., to request that I give him a tutorial course on the Caribbean, since his own professors at the time did not think the region worthy of serious anthropological study.

²⁹ After writing this passage, I discovered that Carrithers (1992) had quoted the same materials from Benedict's work in order to make a related point.

³⁰ In this connexion, I think particularly of a paper by Benedict's friend and fellow poet, Sapir (1924). No doubt Sapir would have felt the same way about Ramon as Benedict did.

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A substances durables, théories laborieuses: la région des Antilles comme *oikoumenê*

Résumé

L'anthropologie culturelle a mis longtemps à s'intéresser aux Antilles, sans doute parce que les cultures qui la composent diffèrent vivement de ce que l'on considère généralement comme son sujet véritable. L'*oikoumenê* antillaise, première région du monde non-occidental à avoir subi une période d'occidentalisation intensive, est d'une certaine manière devenue 'moderne' avant l'Europe elle-même. Si l'histoire lui a concédé une certaine cohérence, celle-ci est plus sociologique que culturelle. C'est pour mettre à jour les concepts dont ils ont besoin pour décrire les processus de globalisation que les chercheurs se penchent aujourd'hui sur le cas des Antilles. Mais comme ils persistent à traiter l'histoire distinctive de cette région d'une manière trop légère, ils n'ont pour l'instant obtenu que des résultats inégaux.

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