

MICHAEL CRATON — *Testing the Chains: Resistance to Slavery in the British West Indies*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1983. Pp. 389.

The explosion of interest in social history of the last decade or so and in slavery studies in particular has generated a string of very high quality works on various aspects of Caribbean society in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Michael Craton has been as much responsible for this trend as anyone and his latest volume is a worthy successor to his earlier work. Despite the title the author's major concern is not slave resistance *per se* but rather rebellions and conspiracies to rebel by peoples of African origin. Over ninety percent of the book is a careful chronicling and comparative analysis of overt and organized resistance in the one-third of the Caribbean controlled by the British. There is much new material here on both the lesser-known uprisings such as the remarkable slave, free coloured and maroon resistance in Grenada, St. Vincent and St. Lucia in the 1790s, as well as the more familiar Jamaican maroon wars and the great set-piece rebellions of the last years of the slave regime. As fresh insights abound the volume will no doubt be the standard work on the subject for many years for reasons quite apart from the fact that it pulls together subject matter previously only available from many disparate sources.

The book is organized around the major types of slave resistance. After the brief section on slave resistance short of rebellion already referred to, the book divides rebellions into the partly chronological three-part pattern of maroon resistance, predominantly African revolts, and predominantly Creole revolts. Africans aimed at recreating African social structures, Creoles had a coherent Afro-Caribbean ideology aimed at establishing societies of independent peasants with no exact African counterparts. Islands settled later such as Tobago and Dominica tended to undergo a similar pattern of resistance to that experienced by Barbados and Antigua a century or so earlier though the existence of an indigenous population and the proximity of impenetrable forests and mountains disturbed the pattern. Indeed the author's refusal to push the three-part pattern very far is, on his own evidence, very proper. Creoles for example were important at a much earlier period than has been realized. Yet this scepticism on categories leaves the book with an uncertain structure. The narrative is usually gripping but in the end it is not easy to separate out the various incidents nor to isolate the general factors which turned resistance into revolt.

The general thesis is however clear enough and convincingly argued. In contrast to Eugene Genovese and to a lesser extent Mary Turner, Craton maintains that slave resistance was always likely to become rebellion and that the goal of the slaves remained the constant, albeit modest, one of creating lives of their own. While slaves were always ready to take advantage of revolutionary upheaval in Europe the ideology of the age of revolution left the slave untouched. Freedom after 1775 meant developing the life of the small farmer which most had already tasted on the slave provisions grounds, rather than a commitment to the abstract ideals of the American and French revolutions.

One reservation which this reviewer has also applies to many recent publications. The ironic approach to historical writing, never very common, has become increasingly rare in the last decade — particularly amongst social historians and writers on third world subjects. A sympathy for the condition and responses of the oppressed and exploited — for example the Dominican maroon leader who put a \$2,000.00 bounty on the head of the English governor — has increasingly come to preclude that insight into the human condition which comes from an agnosticism towards the possibility of human progress. It is neither a defence of the plantation regimes nor a criticism of their exploited labour forces to doubt that the whites were as consistently unready, indiscreet, and cowardly, or the slaves as frequently heroic, as portrayed here. Many of the problems of the planters and opportunities for the slaves arose from the free rider effect. Measures which reduced outbreaks, and extended and

generalized the long period free of rebellions such as occurred in the U.S. South and Barbados, required co-operation between planters. Unless a St. Domingue type situation was threatened there was always a tendency for individual planters to opt out of mutually beneficial measures. These would include the refusal to buy the warlike Coromantine slaves and to provide militia patrols outside their own local areas.

Some might also question Craton's assessment of missionary activity in the last years of slavery as well as the relationship between rebellion and emancipation. The salient feature of plantation regimes in the Americas was their ability to sustain the oppression of slaves over nearly four centuries — despite the frequency of local conspiracies and rebellions. With the single exception of St. Domingue, slave regimes were turned into free labour regimes (though with planter control left intact) as a direct result of intervention from without rather than within. At the risk of sounding Eurocentric what made the later rebellions dangerous to the planters was the metropolitan response to the actions of the slaves rather than the rebellions themselves. The modest goals of the slaves, and their forbearance — in contrast to the invariably vicious white repression which followed — hint at reasons for the failure of slave revolts in the British Caribbean. To the extent that slaves' behaviour was influenced by Christianity perhaps the real role of the missions was to blunt slave resistance rather than to encourage it. If, as the author argues, slaves adapted Christianity for their own ends they did not do it very effectively in Craton's terms. Perhaps the Gramscian hegemony to which the author briefly refers in the epilogue began to operate as much before 1834 as after.

None of these considerations do anything to devalue the contribution of this volume. Historians of the Caribbean as well as anyone interested in the role of rebellion in this, the most elemental of class relationships, will be using this volume for many years to come.

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PETER DESHAZO — *Urban Workers and Labor Unions in Chile, 1902-1927*. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1983. Pp. xxxi, 351.

Social scientists interested in early twentieth-century Chile will find this monograph of particular value. The author studies the working people in the nation's two largest cities, Santiago and Valparaiso, and the labour unions they organized from 1902 to 1927. The earliest strike by an Anarcho-Syndicalist "resistance society" or workers' group in 1902 is the starting point of this analysis, and the seizure of power in 1927 by the anti-labour dictator Carlos Ibanez marks the end of the initial period of union importance in Chilean history. The first three chapters are devoted to a careful portrait of urbanization and industrialization and the employment and living conditions of urban workers in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The final five chapters are organized chronologically and investigate in detail the uneven, but constant, growth of labour organizations.

DeShazo convincingly demonstrates that the Anarcho-Syndicalists established the largest and most effective unions in Chile during the early decades of the century. Membership statistics, the number of strikes sponsored by their groups, and the successes of their efforts are cited as proof of this thesis. The attraction of Anarchism to Chilean urban labourers is explained by the almost entirely national leadership of the movement, its emphasis on anti-authoritarianism and local autonomy, and the attention its unions gave to practical "bread-and-butter" issues such as wages, hours, and working conditions. The study also traces the