

Odious Commerce: Britain, Spain and the Abolition of the Cuban Slave Trade. By DAVID MURRAY. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980. Cambridge Latin American Studies, 37. Tables. Notes. Bibliography. Index. Pp. xi, 423. Cloth. \$44.50.

The study of the Atlantic slave trade in recent decades has become an important area of research. Analyses of the economic, social, and demographic aspects of the trade have led to vital new insights into African as well as American history. Within this larger concern, considerable attention has also been devoted to the older political debates on the causes of Britain's own abolitionist movement and its later efforts to suppress all the other major Atlantic slave trades. Roger Anstey integrated much of the newer economic and social materials in an attempt to respond to the materialist causal model proposed by Eric Williams in the 1940s. At the same time, the English bias of the older studies on the international abolitionist campaign, based almost exclusively on British sources, was in turn challenged in the model study of Leslie Bethell on the British effort to suppress the Brazilian slave trade. Now David Murray has provided an equally impressive work on the British campaign to end the Cuban slave trade, the longest running and most tenacious trade opposed by the British.

Unlike in the Brazilian situation, the British initially seemed to have more power to affect change in the Spanish and Cuban environments. Up to the 1840s, they actively intervened in insular politics and even sent confirmed abolitionists and emancipationists to the island as British consuls. At all times they controlled the African coastal sources for Cuban slaves and were a powerful factor in Madrid politics. Finally, they were Spain's major ally against the United States and its annexationist drives. Despite a campaign that lasted from before the first treaty of 1817 to the final antitrade act of 1866, however, Spain continually and successfully frustrated British demands while accepting the legitimacy of its claims.

Though the author would be loath to acknowledge it, his study really does show the efficacy of Spanish diplomacy. Fearing that an end to the trade would undermine the island's prosperity, the Madrid government successfully resisted British pressure. In contrast to the Brazilians, who were finally caught without a treaty in the 1840s and thus subjected to the use of direct British force, the Spaniards never allowed the situation to deteriorate to that point. It was only the rise of internal Cuban and Spanish antitrade agitation that finally forced the government to abolish the Cuban trade.

This is primarily a diplomatic history and as such it is extremely well done. It is based on a careful use of both Spanish and English archives,

and it shows a good command of the primary and secondary literature on Cuba as well as on Spain and England. It also has some quite original things to say about long-debated issues, such as the British involvement in the 1844 Escalera conspiracy, the numbers and volume of the nineteenth-century illegal trade, and the history of the *emancipado* issue.

Outstanding as this volume is, there are some weaknesses worth noting. We are never given any detailed explanation for the crucial mid-century shift toward abolition in Spanish and Cuban thought. For this the reader will still have to rely on the older study by Corwin. The author's failure to analyze the changing nature of the international sugar market, which turned the United States into Cuba's dominant trading partner, leads him to the suggestion that it was primarily Britain's humanitarian attack on the slave-trade interests that caused it to lose commercial advantage in Cuba. Finally, Murray's extreme defense of this humanitarian impulse sometimes leads him to reject alternative explanations suggested by his own evidence. At the same time, his corresponding moral outrage against the Spaniards blinds him to the ultimate success of their policy. Thus, along with its other qualities, Murray's study is also a model on how a weaker and dependent nation can maintain its independence of action despite unremitting pressure from a powerful imperial state.

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COLONIAL AND INDEPENDENCE PERIODS

The Mining Society of Potosí, 1776–1810. By ROSE MARIE BUECHLER. Ann Arbor: University Microfilms International for the Department of Geography, Syracuse University, 1981. Notes. Tables. Illustrations. Bibliography. Glossary. Index. Pp. xv, 431. Paper. \$24.50.

Silver mining remained of fundamental importance to the Spanish imperial economy in the late colonial period, despite the increased attention paid by the crown to policies of economic diversification. By 1776, when Upper Peru was incorporated in the new viceroyalty of the Río de la Plata, the mining city of Potosí was a shadow of its former self. But it remained the most important mining center in South America, and, together with surrounding provinces, was responsible for over 60 percent of total Peruvian production. Research into the economic history of the