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## CHANGING SUGAR TECHNOLOGY AND THE LABOUR NEXUS: THE CARIBBEAN, 1750-1900

Between 1750 and 1900 revolutionary changes took place in the agricultural and processing technologies of cane growing and sugar production in the Caribbean.<sup>1</sup> The innovations that altered the entire processing structure are fairly well documented: the application of steam power, better cylinders, vacuum pans, centrifuges, double to quintuple effect evaporation, and – regarding the scale of operations rather than their nature – ‘usines centrales’. Important changes are also to be found in the sector that bridges the gap between cultivation and processing, i.e. transportation: movable rails, fixed rails often combined with steam traction, and conveyer belts. Finally, somewhat less well documented, we find a number of modifications in the agricultural sphere: new cane varieties; more (or less) ratooning, alterations in planting distances, ploughs, better drainage and irrigation, and the application of manure and fertilizer.

During the same period the social organization of Caribbean sugar production changed considerably, although not everywhere at the same rate or to the same degree. The slave trade and slavery were abolished throughout the region. Indentured labour, free seasonal labour, and free permanent labour were substituted for slavery or initially employed in addition to it. In a number of cases the ‘new’ (ex-slave) peasantry started to produce sugar as well. Often, two or more of these employment conditions coexisted in one country during several decades, which may very well have led to modifications within each labour mode, even though we still would call it by the same name (slavery). But even in countries where slavery was the dominant type of social organization of production until the very end, alterations in labour relations occurred, partly as a result of the adoption of ‘amelioration policies’ and concomitant new legislation.

Given these two sets of fundamental changes, the question might be