

Women and Slavery in the Caribbean A Feminist Perspective

by
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Much has been written on the subject of New World slavery, and indeed it may seem that the time has come for all such considerations to cease. For the people of the Caribbean, however, slavery is a crucial aspect of their historical experience, and its existence and legacy are not confined to the distant past. In Cuba, for example, slavery still existed less than a hundred years ago. The study of history is important not for its own sake, but in order to acquire an understanding of the workings of society that we can apply to our present experience. In the women's movement throughout the world, women have had to reexamine and reinterpret history and often rewrite it in order to make women visible. In this article I shall attempt to reinterpret the history of slavery in the Caribbean from a woman's perspective. I hope by so doing to expose some of the ideology that conceals material oppression.¹

Caribbean slavery has been attributed varying positions in Marxist mode-of-production analysis. To some (Padgug, 1976-1977; Genovese, 1967) it was a particular form of production within the worldwide capitalist system. To others (e.g., Post, 1978), however, it was a distinct mode of production, though it was incorporated into the sphere of exchange of the capitalist one. This view is justified by the fact that most, if not all, surplus value was derived from slave labor. According to Post (1978: 22-23), "It was based upon a particular combination of capital, land and labour-power, and as Marx showed, the mere presence of capital, even in conjunction with 'free' labour, let alone chattel slaves, does not make a social formation capitalist."

I take the position that New World slavery in general, and Caribbean slavery in particular, can be seen as the capitalist harnessing of an

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