

«GIVE TO THE LABOR OF AMERICA,
THE MARKET OF AMERICA»:
MARKETING THE OLD SOUTH'S SUGAR CROP, 1800-1860

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En la época anterior a la Guerra Civil estadounidense, la industria azucarera de Louisiana pasó de fabricar cantidades insignificantes de edulcorante a elaborar 264.000 Tn., debido al aumento del consumo interno y de su capacidad productiva. Sin embargo, fue incapaz de contrarrestar las crecientes exportaciones caribeñas. Este estudio arguye que los hacendados esclavistas de dicha región operaban en un mercado muy dinámico, en el que se mostraron muy pronto culturalmente mal preparados para competir. Su ética individualista y celosa de su independencia (valores procedentes de la esclavitud) obstaculizó sus esfuerzos asociativos y, como resultado, comercializaron su artículo por separado, saturando la demanda, deprimiendo los precios y debilitando su posición particular y colectiva en el negocio.

PALABRAS CLAVES: *Louisiana, siglo XIX, azúcar, esclavos, mercado, plantación, ética social, empresarios.*

A cacophony of sounds, voices, shouts, accents, and laughter rang out over the New Orleans levee. The shrill peal of steamboat whistles and tolling bells further encroached upon the antebellum soundscape as workers, black and white, Irish and German, Creole and American toiled along the riverfront manoeuvring bales of cotton and manhandling the large hogsheads of sugar that had so recently arrived from the plantations in New Orleans' immediate hinterland. A forest of masts greeted the visitor as steamers, ships, and flatboats crowded the narrow levee crest, lying four and five deep, transporting the produce of the Mississippi Valley to the burgeoning markets of the Northeast. Steam towboats plowed upriver from the Gulf of Mexico, piloting vessels of every nation through the channels of the Mississippi delta and toward the wharves of the nation's pre-eminent southern port. Scattered along the waterfront lay cargoes of pork and beef from Ohio, coal from Pittsburgh, lead, lumber, and furs from the upper Mississippi and

Allegheny Mountains, and kegs of flour, corn, whisky, and every provision imaginable. But among all the domestic produce lay teas from China, coffee from the Indies, and tierces of Caribbean sugar; products that enhanced the Americans increasingly cosmopolitan diet, but competed directly with the domestic cane sugar industry for a share of the U.S. market. The entire scene astonished visitors who left the city amazed by the scale of the riverside market, the extraordinary range of commodities traded, and staggered by the multitude of tongues and accents that resounded along the waterfront. As one observer noted, the «interminable chant [...] and sonorous chorus» of the slaves, laboring at the pace of their shouts, hollers, and workplace songs, echoed from one wharf to the next as western boatmen and foreign sailors rubbed shoulders with New Orleans' commercial elite. The veritable «roar» of human interaction peaked during the key trading months—October to June—when the levee front witnessed an almost unparalleled display of goods transported to the city from the frigid climes of the upper Midwest to the sultry heat of the tropics. The waterfront wharves might have impressed visitors like Charles Lanman and Basil Hall as «one of the wonders of this wonderful age», reverberating with «an air of great commercial bustle», but the city's status as the storehouse of the Mississippi and «the receptacle of a hundred climes» convinced both foreigners and Americans alike that New Orleans was indeed the «greatest exporting city in the world». This «goal of a thousand steamships», one observer noted, fused America's domestic economy with that of the Atlantic world; it integrated the Ohio, Missouri, and Mississippi rivers into a network of trade links, drawing farms and plantations in distant and isolated portions of America into a vigorous commercial marketplace¹.

¹ The author wishes to express his gratitude to the Arts and Humanities Research Board of the United Kingdom for funding the project «Race and Labour in the Cane Fields: Documenting Louisiana Sugar, 1844-1917» (APN, n° 16, 426) from which this paper derives. Descriptions of the New Orleans levee are drawn from J.D.B. DEBOW, «The Crescent City», *Commercial Review of the South and West*, 3, Michigan, 1847, pp. 239-42; J.R. CREECY, *Scenes in the South and Other late Miscellaneous Pieces*, Washington D.C., Thomas McGill, 1860, pp. 9-12; B. HALL, *Travels in North America in the Years 1827 and 1828*, Philadelphia, Carey, Lea, & Carey, 1829, p. 286; C. LANMAN, *Adventures in the Wilds of the United States and British American Provinces* (2 vols.), Philadelphia, John W. Moore, 1856, t. 2, pp. 203-4; T. POWER, *Impressions of America During the Years 1833, 1834, and 1835*, 2 vols., Philadelphia: Carey, Lea, and Carey, 1836, t. II, pp. 144-5; R. BAIRD, *View of the Valley of the Mississippi or the Emigrant's and Traveller's Guide to the West*, Philadelphia: H.S. Tanner, 1834, pp. 280-1; G.W. FEATHERSTONHAUGH, *Excursion through the Slave States*, New York, Harper & Brothers, 1844, p. 140; L.B. SHIPPEE (ed.), *Bishop Whipple's Southern Diary, 1843-1844*, Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 1937, pp. 95-6; H. LEWIS, *The Valley of the Mississippi Illustrated*, St. Paul, Minnesota Historical Society, 1967 (trans., A.H. Poatgieter, ed. B.L. Heilbron, 1th ed. 1854), pp. 400-1, and L. FITZGERALD TASISTRO, *Random Shots and Southern Breezes*, 2 vols., New York, Harper & Brothers, 1842, t. 2, pp. 68-9. On the waterfront, also see A. KELMAN, *A River and its City: The Nature of Landscape in New Orleans*, Berkeley, University of California Press, 2003, especially chap. 2. Finally, on the soundscape of early America, see R.C. RATH, *How Early America Sounded*, Ithaca, Cornell University Press,

No where was this truer than in the desolate swamps of southern Louisiana; «a remote corner of the world» as planter A.T. Conrad described rural St. Mary Parish in the far west of Louisiana's sugar producing belt. For centuries, the meandering bayous of the Mississippi floodplain had been home to native Americans who adapted their agriculture to the vagaries of their alluvial landscape and the perennial risk of spring freshets and inundation. The rivers and bayous that snaked through the region, however, constantly replenished the rich soils leaving narrow corridors of highly fertile land that followed the crescents and bends of Louisiana's dense network of watercourses. Despite its advantages, the humid climate and lush soils of southern portions of the state were ill-suited for short staple cotton, the antebellum South's principal crop. The fertile alluvium, nonetheless, proffered wealth for those who could tame the habitat and convert «waste lands into verdant fields», as one nineteenth-century writer observed, and reap «stores of gold and silver from the glebe they turned up». But until the introduction of modern frost resistant canes, cane farming on the lower reaches of the Mississippi proved a perilous and risky pursuit. Located on the northern rim of the Caribbean sugar-producing belt, Louisiana faced a series of overlapping meteorological problems. Icy winds from Minnesota swept down the central corridor of the nation, bringing sharp frosts that froze the sucrose-rich juice within the canes and rendered it all but worthless. Cane growers faced an almost impossible dilemma —they could plant the majority of their seed crop in January and harvest it some nine or ten months later. But in doing so, the slave crews who entered the fields in mid to late October harvested immature cane with lower sucrose content than that enjoyed by their Caribbean rivals. Alternatively, they could wait a few weeks more, maturing their canes, but pitting their fortunes against the climes. As William P. Bradburn of the Plaquemine *Southern Sentinel* underscored, the risk of misfortune ultimately defined antebellum sugar farming. «In our countryside», he observed,

«The people seem run mad upon the culture of staple products [...] They turn the farmers' life into that of a gambler and speculator. They are dependent upon chance, and an evil turn of the cards —a bad season, a fall in prices, or some such usual calamity».

Despite such grave counsel, Bradburn observed, planters continued to «run mad» funnelling vast sums into land, slaves, and sugar production equipment in the sixty years following Etienne Boré's successful granulation of Louisiana sugar in 1793. Transforming the landscape, planters and slaves converted the river crests and levee fronts into a network of plantations that stretched from the Gulf

2003, and M.M. SMITH, *Listening to Nineteenth-Century America*, Chapel Hill, University of North Carolina Press, 2001.

of Mexico in the South to Rapides Parish in central Louisiana and to St. Mary Parish in the West².

Initially growing cane in the New Orleans hinterland, planters swiftly expanded along the Mississippi River to Baton Rouge. With hardier cane varieties increasingly available and steam power reducing the length of time it previously took to grind canes with animal powered mills, sugar planters successfully cultivated lands in the hill country north of the state capitol and farmed cane where it had previously been deemed unfeasible to do so. To the west, the antebellum sugar industry similarly expanded along Bayous Teche and Lafourche and the many tributaries that fed into them. Reasonable cane prices combined with federal tariff protection encouraged further experimentation in the 1840s as the industry gradually expanded, occupying new lands, draining swamps, and reclaiming the marshy landscape for the sugar masters. By the eve of the Civil War, the antebellum industry reached its geographic and production limits. Ultimately constrained by the volume of available land and by cane sugar's susceptibility to frost, the industry nonetheless posted remarkable growth. By mid-century, some 125,000 enslaved African Americans toiled on 1500 estates producing 250,000 hogsheads of raw sugar (each weighing between 1000 and 1200 lbs). In the following decade, planters consolidated their holdings, smaller producers left the industry, and the total number of sugar estates declined to 1300. Consolidation, however, did not check overall expansion. Infact, by 1853, Louisiana planters produced a quarter of the world's exportable sugar. Enthusiastically fanning regional pride, Representative Miles Taylor announced that such progress «is without parallel in the United States, or indeed in the world in any branch of industry». After several poor crops in the mid 1850s, production recovered in the final antebellum years and as the nation descended into Civil War, planters celebrated the bumper 1861 harvest of 460,000 hogsheads. It was the last crop made entirely by slave labor and the crowning moment of the antebellum sugar masters³.

² «A.T. Conrad to David Weeks», 16 December 1827, Weeks (David & Family) Papers, Louisiana State University Libraries, Louisiana and Lower Mississippi Valley Collections, Baton Rouge, LA (hereafter LSU); *Planters' Banner*, Franklin, 16 March 1848, and *Southern Sentinel*, Plaquemine, 22 June 1850. On the historical geography of the cane world, see: S.B. HILLIARD, «Site Characteristic and Spatial Stability of the Louisiana Sugarcane Industry», *Agricultural History*, 53, Berkeley, 1979, pp. 254-69, and J.B. REHDER, *Delta Sugar: Louisiana's Vanishing Plantation Landscape*, Baltimore, Johns Hopkins University Press, 1999, pp. 1-59. On early Louisiana, also see D.H. USNER, Jr., *Indians, Settlers, and Slaves in a Frontier Exchange Economy: The Lower Mississippi Valley Before 1783*, Chapel Hill, University of North Carolina Press, 1992, pp. 149-90.

³ *De Bow's Review*, 1, New Orleans, 1846, pp. 55-6. On the growth of the sugar industry, see R. FOLLETT, *The Sugar Masters: Planters and Slaves in Louisiana's Cane World, 1820-1860*, Baton Rouge, Louisiana State University Press, 2005, especially chap. 1, also «On the Edge of Modernity: Louisiana's Landed Elites in the Nineteenth-Century Sugar Country», E. DAL LAGO and R. HALPERN (eds.), *The American South and the Italian Mezzogiorno: Essays in Comparative History*,

Having shored-up the colossal power of the Mississippi, converted swamps into plantations, and tamed the landscape, if not the climate, planters in Louisiana's cane world transformed their region and economy. No longer so remote, southern Louisiana's economic future lay with the nation's predilection for sweeteners and with the cut and thrust of commercial competition; a world sugar market where Louisianans competed against their Caribbean rivals, marketing their sugars in a dozen cities throughout the nation, and vying for their share of the market. This essay examines the growth in demand for cane sugar in the United States and the attempts made by Louisiana's elite to control the vagaries of price through their marketing strategies. Yet despite their efforts, the plantocracy proved singularly incapable of sheltering themselves from the peaks and troughs of global competition and price change. They rarely cooperated for their common good, instead pursuing highly individualistic marketing plans. As we shall see, the social ethic of southern slaveholding undermined the planters' capacity to cooperate and compete in the increasingly competitive domestic market. Antebellum sugar planters were unquestionably capitalist in their vision and invested in highly developed plantations, but as a generation of historical scholarship has shown, the culture of American slaveholding ultimately bred jealous independence, a myopic focus on the individual, one's own authority, and upon personal liberty. Acquisitive and market-oriented, expansionist slaveholders spoke a lingua franca of modernity, but tempered it with paternalism, planter hegemony, and a region-wide commitment to the preservation of liberty, slavery, and republican precepts of independence and virtue. Yet above all, the planters' self-identity remained anchored to the plantation and to their role as slaveholders and labor lords. Capital expenditure on a plantation mansion, more slaves, or the latest machinery heightened the planters' sense of mastery over land, labor, and sugar, though public cooperation did little to exalt their power. The sugar elite accordingly remained deaf to the calls for united action in the market—they dispatched their sugars without reference to one another, grumbling continuously

Basingstoke, Palgrave, 2002, pp. 73-94; J.C. SITTERSON, *Sugar Country: The Cane Sugar Industry in the South, 1753-1950*, Lexington, University of Kentucky Press, 1953, pp. 13-44, and P.A. CHAMPOMIER, *Statement of the Sugar Crop Made in Louisiana, 1845-1846*, New Orleans, Cook, Young, & Co., 1846, p. 35; 1849-1850, p. 51; 1859-1860, p. 39, and *1861-1862*, p. 39. On northern expansion and increased yields, see *De Bow's Review*, 2, New Orleans, 1846, p. 442, and 3, 1847, p. 414; *Alexandria Democrat*, reprinted in *Planters' Banner*, Franklin, 13 January 1848, and *American Agriculturist*, 9, Indianapolis, 1850, p. 351. Postwar events are summarized in R. FOLLETT and R. HALPERN, «From Slavery to Freedom in Louisiana's Sugar Country: Changing Labor Systems and Workers' Power, 1861-1913», B. MOITT (ed.), *Sugar, Slavery, and Society: Perspectives on the Caribbean, India, the Mascarenes, and the United States*, Gainesville, University Press of Florida, 2004, chap. 7, and L. FERLEGER, «Farm Mechanization in the Southern Sugar Sector after the Civil War», *Louisiana History*, 23, Lafayette, 1982, pp. 21-34, but above all, see J. RODRÍGUEZ, *Reconstruction in the Cane Fields: From Slavery to Free Labor in Louisiana's Sugar Parishes, 1862-1880*, Baton Rouge, Louisiana State University Press, 2001.

about prices and factors, yet watching their market position slide. Ready to risk a fortune on more slaves or steam-powered mills, Louisiana's sugar elite embraced a blinkered, estate-focused brand of southern capitalism. It enabled them to produce large crops and ruthlessly exploit their slaves, though it proved ill suited for a market where cooperation might have yielded still greater riches. The peripatetic New York journalist Frederick Law Olmsted astutely deduced the Louisiana sugar masters' central flaw. «Individuals at the South», he concluded, «were enterprising, but they could only move themselves». Herein lay the planters' central dilemma in marketing their sugar crop —they remained, as ever, a disparate group of individuals⁴.

⁴ F.L. OLMSTED, *A Journey in the Seaboard Slave States*, (2 vols.), New York, G. P. Putnam, 1904 (1th ed. 1856), t. 2, pp. 274-5. The literature on planter identity is extensive, but for a good historiographical overview, see M.D. SMITH, *Debating Slavery: Economy and Society in the Antebellum American South*, Cambridge, University of Cambridge Press, 1998. The principal works advocating an essentially non-capitalist perspective on planter identity include, but are not limited to, E.D. GENOVESE, *The Political Economy of Slavery: Studies in the Economy and Society of the Slave South*, New York, Vintage Books, 1965, and E.D. GENOVESE and E. FOX-GENOVESE, *Fruits of Merchant Capital: Slavery and Bourgeois Property in the Rise and Expansion of Capitalism*, New York, Oxford University Press, 1983, and *The Slaveholder's Dilemma: Freedom and Progress in Southern Conservative Thought, 1820-1860*, Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1992. By contrast, Fogel, Engerman, Oakes, and Dusiemberre have stressed the profit-orientation of slaveholders and the capitalist nature of slavery. In later works, however, Oakes, Dusiemberre, and Bowman argued that southern planters were intensely capitalist, but not democratic and sought to maintain strict social hierarchies at the expense of liberal capitalism. See R.W. FOGEL and S.L. ENGERMAN, *Time on the Cross: The Economics of American Negro Slavery*, New York: W.W. Norton, 1974; R.W. FOGEL, *Without Consent or Contract: The Rise and Fall of American Slavery*, New York, W.W. Norton, 1989; J. OAKES, *The Ruling Race: A History of the American Slaveholders*, New York, Vintage Books, 1982, and *Slavery and Freedom: An Interpretation of the Old South*, New York, Knopf, 1990; S.D. BOWMAN, *Masters and Lords: Mid-Nineteenth-Century U.S. Planters and Prussian Junkers*, New York, Oxford University Press, 1993, and W. DUSINBERRE, *Them Dark Days: Slavery in the American Rice Swamps*, New York, Oxford University Press, 1996. On the southern fixation with liberty and independence, also see J.W. HARRIS, *Plain Folk and Gentry in a Slave Society: White Liberty and Black Slavery in Augusta's Hinterlands*, Middletown, Conn., Wesleyan University Press, 1985; W.J. COOPER, *Liberty and Slavery: Southern Politics to 1860*, New York, McGraw Hill, 1986, and L.K. FORD, *Origins of Southern Radicalism: The South Carolina Upcountry, 1800-1860*, New York, Oxford University Press, 1988. More recently, historians present southern slavery as a complex hybrid of capitalist and pre-capitalist values where slave owners demonstrated capitalist pretensions with a labor system and social values that espoused paternalistic and patriarchal values, these include: C. MORRIS, *Becoming Southern: The Evolution of a Way of Life, Warren Country and Vicksburg, Mississippi, 1770-1860*, New York, Oxford University Press, 1995; M.M. SMITH, *Mastered by the Clock: Time, Slavery, and Freedom in the American South*, Chapel Hill, University of North Carolina Press, 1997; J.R. YOUNG, *Domesticating Slavery: The Master Class in Georgia and South Carolina, 1670-1837*, Chapel Hill, University of North Carolina Press, 1999; J.D. MILLER, *South by Southwest: Planter Emigration and Identity in the Slave South*, Charlottesville, University Press of Virginia, 2002, and W.K. SCARBOROUGH, *Masters of the Big House: Elite Slaveholders of the Mid-Nineteenth-Century South*, Baton Rouge, Louisiana State University Press, 2003.

The rapid growth in the national market for sugar rested foursquare upon its growing affordability and its increased use in all parts of the American diet. As one Cincinnati paper remarked in the mid-1850s, the increase in sugar consumption far outstripped population growth, with the annual demand for sucrose exceeding 900 million pounds, a four-fold increase in twenty years. «That it is a real absolute change in the habits of life, cannot be doubted» the paper intoned on the lifestyle change which propelled the nineteenth-century sugar revolution. Indeed, as one further editorialist added, the increase in US sugar consumption had unleashed

«A complete revolution in the sugar interest of the world [...] and the question is a grave one, whether the production of the article can keep pace with its consumption».

For Louisianans, this would be answered in the negative, but the market opportunity afforded by the sugar revolution and the gilt-edged promise of riches nevertheless lured planters and traders alike into the domestic sugar-producing industry. So attractive were long-term market prospects that having monopolized the best bottomland in the Louisiana cane parishes, planters experimented with the crop in Mississippi, Alabama, but most extensively in Texas. Louisiana's antebellum lords responded uneasily to these inroads on their regional economy, but the boom in domestic sugar consumption would encourage both natives and strangers to engage in and vie for a share of the U.S. market⁵.

At the axis of Louisiana's economic fortune lay rising demand, augmented incomes, and the transformation of the relative position of sucrose from a luxury in the eighteenth century to a staple commodity during the middle decades of the nineteenth. Much like Britain before it, American sugar consumption escalated swiftly. By 1831, for instance, every American consumed 13.33 pounds of sugar while only a decade later, most adult citizens consumed 18 pounds of sugar per person. This marked increase in consumption continued apace through the antebellum era, and by 1850 the per capita consumption of sugar surpassed 30 lbs. per annum. In 1853, Americans enjoyed a bumper and particularly gluttonous year when they consumed over 36 lbs. of sugar per head and throughout the decade, sugar continued to sell briskly in the domestic market. Only the English retained a sweeter tooth than the

⁵ *The Sugar Planter*, Port Allen, 26 January 1856, and *Southern Sentinel*, Plaquemine, 22 December 1855. On land/wealth concentration, see A.W. NIEMI, Jr., «Inequality in the Distribution of Slave Wealth: The Cotton South and Other Southern Agricultural Regions», *Journal of Economic History*, 37, Cambridge, UK, 1977, pp. 747-53; R.W. SHUGG, *Origins of Class Struggle: A Social History of White Farmers and Laborers during Slavery and After, 1840-1875*, Baton Rouge, Louisiana State University, 1939, especially pp. 76-156; H.L. COLES, «Some Notes on Slaveownership and Landownership in Louisiana, 1850-1860», *Journal of Southern History*, 9, Hanover, Penn., 1943, pp. 381-94.

Americans and by the late antebellum decades, both Britain and the United States consumed thousands of pounds of crystalline sugar every year. Domestic U.S. consumption proved so great that it far outstripped Russia, Ireland, France, Holland, and Spain who modestly consumed approximately 6 lbs. of sugar per head per annum. Antebellum cook books, in particular, encouraged the extensive use of sugar within the American diet, particularly in the preparation of pies, tarts, and fruit preservation. The increased use of imported Brazilian coffee spurred sucrose consumption still further. Sugary food, however, was not only the domain of elite or urbane Americans with ready access to grocers. Published just a few years after the Civil War, *Mrs. Hill's New Cook Book* recorded that the humble sweet potato pie required «a thick layer of good brown sugar» while its sister sweet potato pudding needed six ounces of powdered sugar. Sweet potato salad required a teaspoon of sugar, while baked sweet potatoes, Mrs. Hill proclaimed, tasted finer with an extra dash of sugar. If the family remained hungry after so many sweet potato dishes, then one could easily turn to Mrs. Hill's Seccession Pudding, a candied delight that included «three cups of dry crushed sugar». In antebellum America, no crop or dish proved humbler or simpler than the sweet potato. Prepared in countless ways throughout the nation, candied yams, sweet potato pies, and even potato vine tea, all required the addition of a few ounces of sugar. As the *Boston Traveller* noted in 1856, the demand for refined sugar had increased ten-fold in the space of a few years as the city's rum distilleries and refineries required ever-larger quantities of raw sugar. Present on kitchen tables from Massachusetts to Mississippi, powered and loaf sugar increasingly served as an integral part of the middle class or yeoman diet⁶.

The American fixation with sugar, *Hunt's Merchant Magazine* declared in the early 1850s, reflected the «improved prosperity [...] of the United States». Quantita-

⁶ For key works on demand see, P.A. COCLANIS, *The Shadow of a Dream: Economic Life and Death in the South Carolina Low Country, 1670-1920*, New York, Oxford University Press, 1989, especially chap. 3; also his «Distant Thunder: The Creation of a World Market in Rice and the Transformation it Wrought», *American Historical Review*, 98, Durham, 1993, pp. 1050-78. For consumption figures, see *Hunt's Merchant Magazine*, 39, New York, 1858, p. 550; *Farmer's Cabinet And American Herd Book*, 2, Philadelphia, 1837, p. 78; *Houma Ceres*, New Orleans, 30 August 1856; *Weekly Advocate*, Baton Rouge, 29 March 1857, and *Journal of Agriculture*, 1, New York, 1845, p. 281. On sugar and dietary change, S.W. MINTZ, *Sweetness and Power: The Place of Sugar in Modern History*, New York, Penguin Books, 1985; W.A. WOLOSON, *Refined Tastes: Sugar, Confectionary, and Consumers in Nineteenth-Century America*, Baltimore, Johns Hopkins University Press, 2002; E.T. FORDYCE, «Cookbooks of the 1800s», K. GROVER (ed.), *Dining in America, 1850-1900*, Amherst, University of Massachusetts Press, 1987, pp. 93-4; J.G. TAYLOR, *Eating, Drinking, and Visiting in the South: An Informal History*, Baton Rouge, Louisiana State University Press, 1982, p. 58; U.B. PHILLIPS, *Life and Labor in the Old South*, New York, Little, Brown & Co., 1929, p. 229; E.N. MCINTOSH, *American Food Habits in Historical Perspective*, Westport, Conn., Praeger Books, 1995, p. 83; D.L. FOWLER (ed.), *Mrs. Hill's Southern Practical Cookery and Receipt Book*, Columbia, University of South Carolina Press, 1995, pp. 195, 253, and 263-4, and *Boston Traveller*, n° 9, Boston, 1856 quoted in *Houma Ceres*, New Orleans, 26 July 1856.

tive data on regional income trends support this conclusion, for between 1840 and 1860, the average national per capita income for free people increased from \$109 to \$144. Residents in the Northeast maintained particularly high per capita earnings though all areas of the nation posited expanding income and wealth levels. Significantly, for the middle and working classes, real wages for both artisans and common laborers rose by 0.4 to 1.6 percent per annum. In this context, sugar proved highly income and price elastic; namely, the quantity demanded moved sharply as income changed. Thus while antebellum incomes increased by approximately 30 percent, sugar consumption rose from 194 million pounds of sugar in 1840 to 745 million pounds in 1858, an increase of some 282 percent. Sugar certainly became more affordable as the century advanced, though it was principally the dietary transformation and sugar consumption patterns that underpinned America's spiralling sucrose demand from the late 1840s to the mid-1850s⁷.

With greater disposable income available to middle and working-class Americans, the cost of sugar declined in both real and relative terms over the antebellum era as sweeteners increasingly entered the mainstream diet and the wholesale price of sugar gradually declined. Figure 1 indicates the essential downward momentum in the wholesale price of sugar throughout the first half of the nineteenth century. And whether one focuses on specific sugars —be it relatively cheap domestic «plantation» grade sugar in New Orleans or more costly «prime New Orleans» grade sugars in New York— prices declined sharply from the highs of wartime years, during which the British strangled Caribbean trade, to the relative lows of the 1840s and early 1850s. Inclement weather and a hurricane destroyed Louisiana's crop in 1856 causing a temporary price hike, but the overwhelming pattern of sugar prices in the major eastern and southern markets is one of relative decline. With increased supply in both domestic and imported sugars, diminishing prices, and gradually improving wages (particularly during the 1840s), the real cost of sugar relative to income altered substantially. For artisans, the price of a pound of wholesale sugar dropped from 9 percent of their daily wage in the 1820s to just 3 or 4 percent in the 1840s and 1850s. Common laborers likewise watched the

⁷ *Hunt's Merchant Magazine*, 27, New York, 1852, p. 679; R.W. FOGEL [4], p. 85; R.A. EASTERLIN, «Regional Income Trends, 1840-1950», S.E. HARRIS (ed.), *American Economic History*, New York, McGraw-Hill, 1961, pp. 525-54; R.A. MARGO, «Wages and Prices During the Antebellum Period: A Survey and New Evidence», R.E. GALLMAN and J.J. WALLIS (eds.), *American Economic Growth and Standards of Living before the Civil War*, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1992, p. 183, and C. GOLDIN and R.A. MARGO, «Wages, Prices, and Labor Markets before the Civil War», C. GOLDIN and R.A. MARGO (eds.), *Strategic Factors in Nineteenth Century American Economic History: A Volume to Honor Robert W. Fogel*, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1992, pp. 76-80. Significantly, the shift from luxury to staple status in sugar consumption proves consistent with parallel shifts in consumer behaviour, for as per capita income rises, demand frequently shifts from basic food items to higher value products, including at this point former working-class luxuries like sugar. On income elasticity and food, see P.A. COCLANIS [6], p. 53; T.W. SCHULTZ, *The Economic Organization of Agriculture*, New York, McGraw-Hill Book Co., 1953, pp. 71-4; and J.W. MELLOR, *The Economics of Agricultural Development*, Ithaca, Cornell University Press, 1966, pp. 57-80.

price of sugar decline sharply to their income levels. Whereas a pound of sugar cost as much as 16 or 17 percent of their daily wage in the 1820s, it dropped to between six and nine percent of their income in the later periods. Figure 2 reflects this graphically, underscoring the decline in the price of sugar relative to daily wage rates. Indeed the signal transformation of sugar from luxury to staple ensured that once hooked, Americans continued to purchase their sweeteners even during the relative price surges of 1844, 1847, and most particularly during 1856 and 1857. Although one should guard against overestimating the quality of life in industrializing America, common laborers increasingly possessed an income stream that provided a modest living. As one Irishman sang of his pay:

«I entered with them for a season, my monthly pay for to draw,
And being in very good humor, I often sang Erin Go Bragh.
Our provision it was very plenty, to complain we'd no reason at all,
I had money in every pocket, while working on the canal».

Whether this immigrant spooned sugar into his tea remains unknown, but certainly by 1833, one Philadelphia canal laborer's family purchased some sugar along with other dietary staples; some bread, a small amount of meat, several pints of milk, and a half-bushel of potatoes. Through the gradual combination of rising income and declining real and relative costs, mid-nineteenth century Americans enjoyed a period of comparative prosperity as they spent less on food and housing than their antecedents and possessed the financial means to purchase a broader range of retail items, including sugar⁸.

⁸ Sugar price data for Figures 1 and 2 drawn from «Wholesale Prices of Selected Commodities», U.S. BUREAU OF THE CENSUS, *Historical Statistics of the United States, Colonial Times to 1957*, Washington D.C., U.S. Government Printing Office, 1960, Series E 101-12, p. 124. Further data on «plantation grade» and «prime New Orleans grade» drawn from A.H. COLE, *Wholesale Commodity Prices in the United States, 1700-1861*, Cambridge, Mass., Harvard University Press, 1938, pp. 192-357. For comparative price series on sugar see N. DEERR, *The History of Sugar* (2 vols.), London, Chapman & Hall, 1950, t. 2, pp. 524-33; on other commodities, see D.C. NORTH, *The Economic Growth of the United States, 1790-1860*, New York, W.W. Norton, 1966, pp. 239-40. For nominal daily wage rates of artisans and common laborers (used in Figure 2), consult R.A. MARGO and G.C. VILLAFLORES, «Growth of Wages in Antebellum America: New Evidence», *Journal of Economic History*, 47, Cambridge, UK, 1987, pp. 873-95. The figures used in calculating mean wages for Figure 2 are the average of daily wage rates in the Northeast, Midwest, South Atlantic, and South Central states. On the immigrant's consumption of sugar, see P. WAY, *Common Labor: Workers and the Digging of North American Canals, 1780-1860*, Baltimore, Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993, p. 105, and R.O. CUMMINGS, *The American and His Food: A History of Food Habits in the United States*, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1940, pp. 27-8. Finally, research on anthropometric history demonstrates that rising income significantly —though not entirely— shapes nutritional and stature gains. For an overview of this debate, see R.H. STECKEL, «Stature and the Standard of Living», *Journal of Economic Literature*, 33, Pittsburgh, 1995, pp. 1903-40.

FIGURE 1
Wolesale Price of One lb Sugar, 1800-1860



Source: See note 8.

FIGURE 2
Price of Wolesale Sugar (One lb) and Percentage of Nominal Daily Wage Rates of Artisianz and Common Laborers, 1800-1860



Source: See note 8.

For Louisiana's cane planting elite, the economic and dietary changes that propelled their industry forward promised untold riches. Daniel Dennet, proprietor and editor of one of the most prominent agricultural papers in the region, plainly realized the centrality of the working person's enhanced buying power. Immediately below the masthead on Franklin's *Planters' Banner* and adjoining stories of political and economic nature lay the oration «Give to the Labor of America, the Market of America». Quintessentially representing the market orientation of its readers, Dennett faithfully spoke to an industry whose financial success rested on supplying the laboring people of the North with the sugar they required. But for all their bravado and august claims that the industry could readily produce 400,000 hogsheads per annum, if only «fair inducements were held out to the capitalists», Louisiana's cane belt supplied on average 46 percent of the burgeoning national demand from 1837 to 1858. On occasion, notably in the mid-1840s, Louisiana farmers produced over 60 percent of the national demand, but as sugar consumption rose steeply in the 1850s, the domestic sugar industry struggled to maintain its market share from its relatively limited agricultural lands. Poor domestic crops in the mid to late 1850s forced sugar brokers to rely even more extensively on Caribbean imports as Louisianans nervously watched Cuban and Puerto Rican sugars arrive on New York and Philadelphia wharves in increasing volume. The scale of Spanish-Caribbean imports escalated swiftly, particularly those of Cuba. In 1840, for instance, Cubans exported almost 50 million pounds of sugar to the United States; a decade later this figure had surpassed 125 million pounds and during the 1850s, Havana and New York-based shippers conducted a flourishing trade. In 1851 alone, longshoremen working on the Hudson and East River unloaded 94,000 hogsheads of sugar (each containing approximately 1000 to 1200 pounds) and 188,000 boxes of sugar (each containing 400 pounds) from Cuba. Six years later, some 150,000 Cuban hogsheads were received in Manhattan and on New Year's Eve 1860, officials at the Port of New York calculated that 230,000 hogsheads and 165,000 boxes of Cuban sugar had arrived during the calendar year; a grand total of 171,000 tons or 380 million pounds of sugar. Added to that lay another 22,000 tons of Puerto Rican sugar that waterfront workers unloaded onto New York's crowded quays. Louisiana's entire crop of 228,000 hogsheads simply could not match the volume of imported Caribbean sugars that stevedores and draymen along the Atlantic seaboard heaved onto carts bound for warehouses and sugar refineries. Little wonder then that Louisiana's sugar elite quailed at the prospect of annexing Cuba in the 1850s and the introduction of duty-free competition with their Caribbean competitors.⁹

⁹ *Planters' Banner*, Franklin, 13 December 1849, and *Red River Whig*, Alexandria, 6 February 1841. Data on Louisiana production to national consumption, from *Hunt's Merchant Magazine*, 27, New York, 1852, p. 681; U.S. PATENT OFFICE, *Annual Report Of The Commissioner of Patents For The Year 1858*, Washington, D.C., James B. Steedman, 1859, p. 233, and P.A. CHAMPOMIER [3], 1851-1858. On Caribbean competition (especially New York), J.D.B. DEBOW, *The Industrial*

In reality, and as Louisianans well understood, only the maintenance of federal tariff protection ensured profits. The tariff was, planter Alexander Porter deduced, «a question of life and death with us in Louisiana». But for many outside observers, the tariff cocooned sugar planters from market competition and artificially kept the price of imported sugars above the domestic article. As planters complained, however, higher operating costs in Louisiana —than those enjoyed by West Indian producers— ensured that sugar could only be profitably made for 5 ½ cents whereas Caribbean sugar returned a profit at 3 cents a pound. High capital investment in land, labor, machinery, and supplies combined with comparatively poorer yields per acre than those of their competitors ensured that Louisiana sugar proved relatively expensive to produce. Planter Moses Liddell lamented this predicament, stating that cheaply manufactured West Indian imports readily supplied the Eastern port cities and

«This being the case, there is little doubt a great many adventurers in the sugar business [...] will break up and go at cotton».

Liddell's predictions proved accurate as autonomous and individualistic «adventurers» left the sugar trade once prices dwindled. But without the duty on foreign sugar, cane growers predicted an even grimmer future where international competition would bring the native industry to its knees whilst Cuban produce filled the sugar bowls of America¹⁰.

Tariff protection, however, did not shield Louisianans from the volatility of the market and price surges, nor did it protect them from heightened competition with keenly priced Caribbean imports. Indeed, there is little evidence to suggest that sugar planters conducted much long-term economic forecasting. They planted their canes in January, harvested them from October to December, and disposed of the crop shortly afterwards. Given the instability in sugar prices and the unpredictable risk of climatic damage to the cane crops, short-range planning

Resources, etc., of the Southern and Western States, 3 vols., New Orleans, De Bow's Review, 1853, t. II, p. 312, and P.A. CHAMPOMIER [3], *1851-1852*, p. 49; 1857-1858, pp. 41-2, and 1860-1861, pp. 41-2. On the pro-Cuba movement, see F.L. OLMSTED [4], pp. 311-2, and R.E. MAY, *The Southern Dream of a Caribbean Empire, 1854-1861*, Baton Rouge, Louisiana State University Press, 1973, pp. 46-76.

¹⁰ On the tariff, W.H. STEPHENSON and A. PORTER, *Whig Planter of Old Louisiana*, Baton Rouge, Louisiana State University Press, 1934, p. 27; J. ROBERTSON, *A Few Months in America*, London, Longman & Co., 1855, pp. 88-90, and «Moses Liddell to St. John R. Liddell», 19 June 1848, and 27 August 1849, Liddell (Moses, St. John R. & Family) Papers, LSU. Also see D.O. WHITTEN, «Tariff and Profit in the Antebellum Sugar Industry», *Business History Review*, 44, Cambridge, Mass., 1970, pp. 226-33; J.G. TREGLE, Jr., «Louisiana and the Tariff, 1816-1846», *Louisiana Historical Quarterly*, 25, New Orleans, 1942, pp. 24-148; L.C. GRAY, *History of Agriculture in the Southern United States to 1860*, 2 vols., Washington D.C., Carnegie Institute of Washington, 1933, t. 2, pp. 747-8.

ultimately proved entirely prudent for an industry, James Stirling observed that more nearly «approaches the nature of gambling». The precariousness and risk of sugar farming fostered a sense of immediacy among planters who faced three options for marketing their sugars. They either sold their crop or consignments of it on «plantation» to itinerant buyers who removed it from the estate and marketed it at their own risk. Alternatively, they might freight their sugars to an Atlantic seaport to be marketed there, or more commonly, they could forward their crop to factors in New Orleans. Once there, levee front regulations ensured that any sugar landed in New Orleans had to be sold within 36 hours or else warehoused at the planters' expense. The effect of this arrangement exacerbated the planters' weak position in the market as factors expedited the quickest sale possible, often to the detriment of price. And with planters shipping their sugars to New Orleans almost simultaneously, a packed levee and a glutted market promised still lower returns. As cane growers bemoaned,

«Will the Louisiana sugar planters avail themselves of what seems to be poor compensation for years of toil?».

Will they continue to dispatch their crops into a «market over which neither they nor their agents have any control», or withhold their crops in the prospect of higher prices? Although some planters attempted the latter, the majority continued to sell their sugars from November to May and take the best terms available, be it on the levee or with commercial agents touring the plantation belt. The latter frequently offered the New Orleans price, minus transportation costs to the city. Revenue garnered was then immediately employed to service the substantial debts and innumerable credit notes that accrued in sugar farming. As one planter observed, cane growers are,

«Compelled by force of circumstances to sell so soon as the sugar can leave the purgatory, to meet their obligations which must be met, or their credit is gone».

Beyond badgering their representatives in Congress to hold firm on tariff protection, the cane planters ultimately occupied an unenviable position as price takers in the domestic sugar market. Planter conservatism thus conspired with established marketing and credit re-payment patterns to render the sugar community relatively powerless to protect themselves from price oscillation and increased Caribbean competition¹¹.

¹¹ J. STIRLING, *Letters from the Slave States*, London, John W. Parker, 1857, pp. 181-2; *Southern Sentinel*, Plaquemine, 22 December 1855, and *The Sugar Planter*, Port Allen, 1 October 1859. On the concept of the sugar planter as a price-taker who wielded little power over the vagaries of the market, see M.D. SCHMITZ, «Economies of Scale and Farm Size in the Antebellum Sugar Sec-

By the mid 1840s, the loose hold planters had previously enjoyed over the national sugar trade seemed to be slipping out of their grasp. In response, regional newspaper editors urged their readers to cooperate and gain a margin of independence in their market. Above all, they counseled against the ruinous effect of marketing sugar en masse. As the Franklin *Planters' Banner* noted: «Why, then, should we be so blind as to press our crops upon the market?» The answer, editor Robert Wilson explained lay in the scarcity of mercantile information, the speculative manner of New Orleans' merchants, and the planters' tendency to «press a falling glutted market». The principal error, Wilson added, lay in the planters habit of competing against one another «as to who shall reach soonest our chief market with raw undrained sugar» before the purchasers actually required it. Such an error merely left the crop in the power of speculators to «give us from their bounty what price they please». As noted in the New Orleans *Bee*, the rules of supply and demand simply did not function along the levee—supply continued, irrespective of demand. Planter G. DeBouillon of Iberville Parish explained this phenomenon, adding that merchants—who sometimes relied on inaccurate estimates of the size and quality forthcoming crop—urged their planter-clients to harvest their crops early and cash in on good prices. Frightening some producers with the prospect of low prices in the New Year, commission merchants fuelled local rivalries as planters dispatched their crews to the fields and their sugars to New Orleans. Once there, «down goes sugar and down goes the price» DeBouillon seethed. But the merchants' advice, this planter exclaimed, proved more than self-serving for speculators bought sugar in November before warehousing it until March and subsequently profiting from advanced prices. This «unauthorized assumption of power [by] a self-constituted tribunal», another planter fumed, «determine[s] whether we are or not to be remunerated for our labor». Although planter-factor relations proved largely cordial in day-to-day business relations,

tor», *Journal of Economic History*, 37, Cambridge, UK, 1977, pp. 961-2; J.C. SITTERSON, «Financing and Marketing the Sugar Crop of the Old South», *Journal of Southern History*, 10, Hanover, Penn., 1944, pp. 188-99, and W. PRICHARD, «Routine on a Louisiana Sugar Plantation under the Slavery Regime», *Mississippi Valley Historical Review*, 14, Urbana, Ill., 1927, p. 177. The notion of the antebellum farmer as a price-taker receives further attention in G.C. FITE, «Marketing Southern Staples: Comment», *Agricultural History*, 56, Berkeley, 1982, p. 22; M. ROTHSTEIN, «Antebellum Wheat and Cotton Exports: A Contrast in Marketing Organization and Economic Development», *Agricultural History*, 40, Berkeley, 1966, pp. 91-100, and J.R. KILLICK, «The Cotton Operations of Alexander Brown and Sons in the Deep South, 1820-1860», *Journal of Southern History*, 43, Hanover, Penn., 1977, pp. 169-94. On the specific role of factors, see H.D. WOODMAN, *King Cotton and His Retainers: Financing and Marketing the Cotton Crop of the South, 1800-1925*, Columbia, University of South Carolina Press, 1990 (repr.), and R.H. KILBOURNE, Jr., *Debt, Investment, Slaves: Credit Relations in East Feliciana Parish, Louisiana, 1825-1885*, Tuscaloosa, University of Alabama Press, 1995, especially pp. 16-48; and on banking, G.D. GREEN, *Finance and Economic Development in the Old South: Louisiana Banking, 1804-1861*, Stanford, Stanford University Press, 1972, and L. SCHWEIKART, *Banking in the American South from the Age of Jackson to Reconstruction*, Baton Rouge, Louisiana State University Press, 1987.

depressed sugar prices, glutted markets, and the thirty-six hour sale rule in New Orleans bred planter suspicion and resentment. Above all, they resented being «nabobed over» in antebellum parlance by refiners, speculators, and unscrupulous merchants who inaccurately estimated the crop and ill-predicted price change. The planters heightened sensitivity to their honor and their acute sense of individualism made them particularly resentful of wealthy merchant nabobs who might transgress their personal authority and challenge their independence. Above all, they proved especially irritable when faced by a «conclave» of merchants who «enriched themselves at our expense» and exercised final authority on the value of the planters' crop and the size of their profits. Some planters and editorialists, like Robert Wilson, urged cooperation as part of a «united action», while others advocated «union and intercourse» among the plantocracy. The «fatal habit» of Louisiana's elite, one Jefferson Parish planter observed, is that «of so many people wrapped up in their own individuality». Readers of the *Capitolian Vis-à-Vis* might have concurred with this prescient observation. Pointedly speaking to the structural problems within the sugar community, the paper's editorialists lamented that

«There is neither union, co-operation or friendly association existing, each person pursuing his own plan, prosecuting his own theories, and perpetuating a great deal of mischief».

Exasperatedly calling for collaboration and regional association, newspaper editors counselled the sugar masters to protect their interests from «ruinous competition» by prudent management and sagacious marketing¹².

However good such advice appeared in principal, Louisiana's sugar community remained singularly deaf to it. As one editor bluntly put it, the planting community proved «wholly indifferent as well as blind to their own interest», suffering «for a want of some mutual understanding among themselves». Collaboration ultimately proved a dead-letter in the slave South, and nowhere more so than in the debates over the creation of an independent warehouse, where planters could store their sugars before releasing them onto the New Orleans levee. Planters had long complained at the «oppressive system of wharfage» that subjugated sugar manufacturers to sell their sugars rapidly on the levee front or pay storage charges. Bound to their factors «by the chain of debt» and constrained by «arbitrary and despotic» regulations, sugar planters evoked the metaphors of slavery to describe their dependency to New Orleans' commercial elite and the city's mercantile facilities. The central problem lay in the reduction of the allotted

¹² *Planters' Banner*, Franklin, 16 February 1856, and 30 December 1847; *New Orleans Bee* quoted in *The Sugar Planter*, Port Allen, 26 December 1857, and 12 December 1857; *Daily Picayune*, New Orleans, 22 October 1858; *The Weekly Comet*, Baton Rouge, 9 October 1853; *Southern Sentinel*, Plaquemine, 6 March 1852, and *Capitolian Vis-à-Vis*, Port Allen, 23 August, 1854.

space for sugar on the levee. Until the late 1840s, the sugar market extended from Canal to Toulouse Street with a platform on which hogsheads and barrels stood for an indefinite period prior to sale. Exposed to the elements, often without the benefit of tarpaulins, the sugars deteriorated as rain and riverwater seeped into the casks. Mud, from a thousand feet and hooves trampling on the levee, oozed between the barrel staves, leaching river sediment and more into the «most delicate article of produce», sugar. Following the contraction of space allotted to the sugar market, port officials instated the thirty-six hour sale rule; a provision that weakened the seller's position still further and his/her leverage over price. Meetings held by the state's sugar planters in response to the «burdensome regulations» on the levee speculated on the possibility of establishing a planter-owned depot for sugars at Algiers, across the Mississippi river from New Orleans, or upstream from the established market. The primary purpose of the depot was to provide sufficient storage for sugar so that no planter faced a glutted market once again. The logic was impeccable but predictably, the sugar elite lacked the resolve to cooperate beyond holding a few preliminary meetings¹³.

To be sure, planters along the Mississippi River and further west along Bayou Lafourche and Teche initially responded with ardor to the proposals. But unity could not and did not last —planters on the left and right banks of the Mississippi haggled over the preferred location for the «sugar mart», others favored a depot link with the New Orleans, Opelousas, and Great Western Railroad, while the more radical beseeched their fellow land and labor lords to «act more independently of New Orleans and her merchants», and not only make, but sell their own crops. Damning the «disorganized state» of the planter class, editorialists and agriculturists alike implored fellow cane growers to combine, unify, and rely upon self-reliance. As one sugar maker proudly announced «Union is strength». Yet the spirit of associationalism eventually proved too weak. Even the most enthusiastic editors could not mask the thin numbers at the meetings and the want of «brotherhood and unanimity of action» among the delegates. Bickering broke out between the agricultural and commercial press and the entire issue of funding the construction of the mart devolved into dispute. Above all, «apathy and indifference» among the planters stymied the collective action required to turn the proposed mart into reality. Two years later, editor Henry Hyams in rural West Baton Rouge Parish called upon the plantocracy to fund the project by subscribing to the extent of one dollar per hogshead of an average crop. But Hyams was astute to his readers —he knew that many shared the impression that money invested in the mart «is so much thrown away». The press could only do so much,

¹³ *Planters' Banner*, Franklin, 28 July 1855; *Houma Ceres*, New Orleans, 31 January 1855; *Baton Rouge Gazette*, Baton Rouge, 26 December 1846; *The Sugar Planter*, Port Allen, 30 January 1858; *Opelousas Courier*, Opelousas, LA, 6 October 1855; *Houma Ceres*, New Orleans, 13 December 1855; *The Sugar Planter*, Port Allen, 12 December, 1857, and *Planters' Banner*, Baton Rouge, 4 August, 1855.

he continued, for the planters must «assist themselves more». Yet despite such counsel, the mart remained unbuilt and like the failed agricultural association, the empty promises of coalition and alliance failed to unite the sugar masters. The precariousness of sugar farming and the plantation first mentality of most Louisiana cane lords mitigated against collective progress. Individuality eroded collectivity as slaveholders poured capital and resources into their estates; tangible assets in brick and mortar, muscle and sinew that reflected their wealth and mastery over land, labor, and sugar. Above all, their self-identity remained anchored firmly to the plantation and to their role as slaveholders and labor lords. Capital expenditure on a plantation mansion, on more slaves, or on the latest machinery heightened the planters' sense of self, though public investment did little to exalt their power. Such individualism in thought and action proved well suited for independent progress, private profit, and economic autonomy, but it hamstrung their efforts at collaboration and was unsuitable for the increasingly competitive market in which sugar producers operated. Furthermore, it sharpened the dichotomy between the vast wealth and technical superiority of Louisiana's sugar industry and the dearth of agricultural and commercial associations and the relative weakness of the state's infrastructure. The latter received only modest attention or funding, while capital ostensibly flowed to the former. A thousand independent operators and their agents accordingly jostled for position on the New Orleans levee; they bemoaned poor prices and glutted markets, but their social ethic ensured that Louisiana's cane lords remained as price takers and not as price makers working together to their collective advantage¹⁴.

Independence of thought and action, however, did not always work to the planter's detriment. Indeed, some sugar producers —particularly larger cane growers— actively sought to operate outside of the New Orleans factor-merchant complex, transporting their sugars directly from plantation to East coast markets. The marketing operations of two prominent Mississippi River sugar planters —Wade Hampton and Maunsell White— in the 1830s and 1840s reveal a complex trading relationship between the producer and a network of factors and commis-

¹⁴ *Thibodaux Minerva*, Thibodaux, LA, 17 November 1855; *The Sugar Planter*, Port Allen, 12 January 1856; *Planters' Banner*, Franklin, 26 January 1856; *The Sugar Planter*, Port Allen, 5 April 1856; *Southern Sentinel*, Plaquemine, 29 March 1856, and *The Sugar Planter*, Port Allen, 16 January 1858; 23 January 1858, and 26 June 1858. On associationalism, see J.D. WELLS, *The Origins of the Southern Middle Class, 1820-1861*, Chapel Hill, University of North Carolina Press, 2004. Yet on the limits to collective policy, see J. HEITMANN, *The Modernization of the Louisiana Sugar Industry, 1830-1910*, Baton Rouge, Louisiana State University Press, 1987, pp. 40-8; D. DUPRE, «Ambivalent Capitalists on the Cotton Frontier: Settlement and Development in the Tennessee Valley of Alabama», *Journal of Southern History*, 56, Hanover, Penn., 1990, pp. 215-40, especially pp. 237-9; B.G. BOND, *Political Culture in the Nineteenth-Century South: Mississippi, 1830-1900*, Baton Rouge, Louisiana State University Press, 1995, pp. 66-72, and E. DAL LAGO, *Southern Elites: A Comparative Study of the Landed Aristocracies of the American South and the Italian South, 1815-1860*, Ph. D. Diss., London, University of London, 2000, pp. 107-110.

sion agents in several cities. Above all, these planters gauged relative prices and freight costs and strove to minimize the risks of price volatility and glutted markets by distributing their crops to several discrete markets. In so doing, they judiciously spread the risks incumbent in marketing sugar. Wade Hampton's Louisiana land and slaveholdings were immense, even by Caribbean standards. On the banks of the Mississippi River at Houmas, Wade Hampton I established a vast plantation kingdom that included over 400 slaves and produced 1,600 hogsheads of sugar per annum, valued at over \$100,000. In disbursing his crop, Hampton judged the size and quality of the Louisiana harvest, the risks of glutting the New Orleans market, the prospects of future crops and their likely effect on prices current; he judged the stock of sugar in the market and kept a weather-eye on the scale and availability of Cuban imports. A poor harvest in the Matanzas cane fields, for instance, promised rising prices for the domestic article just as a sudden peak in European demand or price might prompt Cuban shippers to sail for Cádiz or Coruña ahead of New York. The condition of the European sugar market thus impacted directly on domestic producers whose short-term gains often rested on events and prices four thousand miles to the East. The effectiveness of post-emancipation labor systems in the production of West Indian sugar similarly shaped international prices as major producers like St. Domingue and Jamaica dwindled, while others, such as Trinidad and Guyana rose on the strength of Indian indentured labor. Added to that, sugar masters like Hampton factored in other imponderables —the extent of ice on the Northern rivers and canals, for instance, proved a very real concern that might delay inland transportation or force the planter to pay additional warehouse charges. Moreover, freight and storage rates varied from city to city as did the terms and prices offered by sugar purchasers. On top of these shifting day-to-day and annual concerns, planters kept a wary-eye on Washington D.C. and returned as many pro-tariff Whigs to Congress as the state's sugar interest could muster. From his desk in rural Ascension Parish, Hampton accordingly evaluated his correspondence, judging his factors' advice, acting on their prospects, and dispatching his sugars accordingly. The slaves who then wheeled the sugar barrels down to the jetty at Houmas and loaded them onto vessels bound for Baltimore, Boston, Philadelphia, and New York thus found themselves bound not solely to their master, but also to an Atlantic trading network¹⁵.

¹⁵ On Hampton and Houmas, see R.E. BRIDWELL, *The South's Wealthiest Planter: Wade Hampton I of South Carolina, 1754-1835*, Ph. D. Diss., Columbia, University of South Carolina, 1980, pp. 387 and 422, and C.E. CAUTHEN (ed.), *Family Letters of the Three Wade Hamptons, 1782-1901*, Columbia, University of South Carolina Press, 1953, p. XIII. On post-emancipation labor systems and sugar production, see J.H. GALLOWAY, *The Sugar Cane Industry: An Historical Geography from its Origins to 1914*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1989, pp. 143-94. On Whiggite voting patterns, see J.M. SACHER, *A Perfect War of Politics: Parties, Politicians, and Democracy in Louisiana, 1824-1861*, Baton Rouge, Louisiana State University Press, 2003, pp.

Strewn across Hampton's desk lay a mass of letters from his factors and commission agents throughout the nation. From New York, Hampton received a steady stream of post from his commission agents, Goodhue & Co., detailing the sale of the enormous consignments of sugar that left Houmas for Manhattan. Factors Harrison and Sterrett from Baltimore, Lippincott and Richards from Philadelphia, and Nathaniel & J. Dick of New Orleans corresponded frequently with Hampton relating market conditions to their client and dispatching sales reports for his sugars. But it was with Goodhue that Hampton maintained his closest correspondence and with whom he shared detailed market information. From 1829 to 1832, Goodhue kept his client apprised of the stock of sugar in the Northern cities, advising him on market conditions, the state and condition of his sugars, and the decision to warehouse his crop in the promise of improved prices later in the year. Given that Hampton shipped between 800 to 1000 hogsheads per annum to New York, Goodhue additionally dispatched ships from Manhattan and Baltimore to Houmas to receive the entire crop. In March 1831, for instance, Goodhue engaged Capt. Welsh and his recently constructed vessel, Montpelier, for the Hampton account. Paying slightly more than average freight charges at \$6.25 per hogshead, Goodhue not only secured a fine ship that would expose his client «to the least possible risqué», but he liased with Hampton's Philadelphia and Baltimore agents over contracting vessels for these markets. When they failed to secure adequate shipping at an appropriate price, Goodhue stepped in and hired three smaller brigs for the Houmas traffic. And once the ships returned to New York, Goodhue made the decision to store the sugar until the market improved. Working in tandem with his Louisiana based client, Goodhue continually advised Hampton on the scale and condition of the Cuban, Puerto Rican, and St. Croix harvests, taking extra note of hurricane damage and the shifting demands of European markets which, on occasion, left «the home market for the Louisiana sugars». But, as the New Yorker fully understood, Hampton's and Louisiana's position ultimately remained vulnerable as Cuba, he concluded, is «always ready to make up our deficiencies with low priced brown sugar»¹⁶.

187-9. On Caribbean crop failure, see «Goodhue & Co. to Wade Hampton I», 28 September 1829, and 29 June 1832. On ice, «N. & J. Dick & Co. to Wade Hampton I», 4 January 1832. On freights, for instance, «Harrison and Sterrett to Wade Hampton I», 8 August 1829; «Goodhue & Co. to Wade Hampton», 18 March 1832; «Jesse Strong to Wade Hampton», I, 4 July 1834. On tariff concerns, «Goodhue & Co. to Wade Hampton I», 25 January 1831, and 3 February 1831, all in Wade Hampton Papers, University of South Carolina, South Caroliniana Library, Columbia, SC (hereafter SCL).

¹⁶ «Wade Hampton I to Goodhue & Co.», 20 July 1832. For examples of correspondence see, «Harrison and Sterrett to Wade Hampton I», 8 August 1829; «Goodhue & Co to John Perry», 23 September 1829; «N. & J. Dick & Co. to Wade Hampton I», 14 November 1831; «Lipincott and Richards to Wade Hampton I», 25 January 1832, and «Goodhue & Co. to Wade Hampton I», 22 April 1829 (for Boston traffic). For examples of Goodhue predicting market activity, see for instance «Goodhue & Co. to Wade Hampton I», 10 February 1831, and 23 July 1831. On volumes traded,

Hampton may well have ceded great responsibilities to Goodhue, but he was not entirely powerless. Indeed, in November 1831, he decided to market his sugars in New Orleans, partly due to a depressed market in New York and the relatively small scale of his annual crop. Two months later, he sold his sugars through an alternative buyer, writing:

«I begin to fear that sales in this country, other than small parcels is a difficulty, if not impracticable undertaking and that I shall, in the end, be obliged to presume my former course of business».

Having fallen out —albeit temporarily— with Dick's consortium in New Orleans, he began to ship sugar to New York again. Yet within a few months, Hampton had reversed his position a further time. The low prices in the North and some «advantageous sales» to itinerant western buyers, he wrote to Goodhue,

«Induced me to try the experiment and I succeeded in the disposal of my whole crop for that market. Whether I repeat the experiment or resume my consignments to the North»,

he concluded, «will depend upon prices and the respective demands». Within the year, however, Goodhue's vessels returned to the Houmas as Hampton's slaves toiled along the jetty, winching the hogsheads onto the ocean going ships that bobbed gently on the Mississippi¹⁷.

Described by friend William Hamilton as «a cautious, prudent, [and] discriminating man», Wade Hampton attempted to exercise some leverage over the market; he moved his sugars around the nation seeking the best price available after deducting relevant freight and storage charges. Goodhue, likewise, held back his agent's crop when prices proved disappointing and endeavoured to secure the best return the market could offer. But even Hampton and Goodhue operated as price takers. Notwithstanding federal tariff protection and international competition, the vagaries of global pricing and unstable markets powerfully influenced Hampton's profits. Despite his best efforts, Hampton ultimately failed to control the market with the same degree of success as he mastered his land and slave crews. Much like Hampton, Maunsell White similarly marketed his sugars

see «Goodhue & Co. to Wade Hampton I», 10 July 1834. On the Montpelier, see «Goodhue & Co. to Wade Hampton I», 8, 9, 14, 18, 29, and 30 March 1831; 6 April 1831, and 17 May 1831, and «Goodhue & Co. to William J. Geiger», 12 March 1831. On Cuban and other Caribbean imports see, «Goodhue & Co. to Wade Hampton I», 3 August 1831; 19 November 1831, 29 June 1832, and 30 November 1829, and «Harrison and Sterrett to Wade Hampton I», 26 September 1831, Wade Hampton Papers, SCL.

¹⁷ «Wade Hampton to N. J. Dick & Co.», 17 November 1831, and 29 January 1832; «N. & J. Dick to Wade Hampton», 30 January 1832, and 4 February 1832, and «Wade Hampton to Goodhue & Co.», 20 July 1832, Wade Hampton Papers, SCL.

nationally, maintaining close links with Dunlop, Moncure & Co. in Richmond, Robert Patterson in Philadelphia, and on occasion with John Kraft in Memphis. Shipping his sugars direct from his estate in Plaquemines Parish to Northern markets or selling direct from the plantation when prices, freights, and market conditions favored it, White bemoaned «this loosing business» where poor prices, high interest rates for negotiating bills of exchange, and incompetent freighters frustrated his operations. Occasionally dispatching his sugars for the British market though more frequently marketing his goods in the Northeast, White worried about sugar deterioration on the long sea trips to Philadelphia and continually seethed about a credit system that «will ruin any country». These, he bluntly added, are,

«The reflections of a man who looks a little further ahead than the mere matter of the day or the trifling difference of a few cents».

Indeed, from White's perspective, independence of thought and action proved essential for business success. «I am one of those», he declared,

«Who believe in protecting myself independent of any aid from the government by using skill, industry, and economy».

For White, much like Hampton, individualism ensured one's flexibility in the market, but it also divorced him from the ethos of associationalism that the local press clamoured for¹⁸.

Few planters, of course, possessed the financial muscle of Wade Hampton or Maunsell White and few commission agents enjoyed such large marketing contracts as Goodhue or Patterson. Most sugar producers found themselves in a considerably weaker position, funnelling their sugars through New Orleans and accepting —albeit grudgingly— the merchants' price. And when they shipped their sugars direct to the North, they often unwittingly glutted the market and inevitably drove prices down. As Maunsell White grumbled, «everyone has a rush to be the first in market». Indeed, so serious was the planters tendency to ship en masse to a single market that the St. Louis *Intelligencer* specifically warned sugar pro-

¹⁸ «William S. Hamilton to John Hamilton», 12 April 1811, quoted in R.E. BRIDWELL [15], p. 382; «Maunsell White to Robert Patterson & Co.», 6 July 1846, and 18 September 1846; «Maunsell White to Hamilton Smith», 17 September 1849, and «Maunsell White to John Kraft», 24 January 1850. On shipping difficulties, see «Maunsell White to Robert Patterson & Co.», 29 May 1846, and «Maunsell White to Dunlop, Moncure & Co.», 2 February 1848, and 16 May 1848; On exchange rates, also see «Maunsell White to Robert Patterson & Co.», 23 June 1846; On shipping to England and deterioration, «Maunsell White to Robert Patterson & Co.», 28 July 1846, Maunsell White Papers, University of North Carolina, Southern Historical Collection, Chapel Hill, NC (hereafter UNC). For other accounts of shipping to England, see *Baton Rouge Gazette*, Baton Rouge, 9 August 1845, and *Le Messenger*, Bringier, 28 April 1854.

ducers in December 1852 to «exercise a little more discretion in sending such heavy consignments» to a city whose principal trade links were frozen during the winter months. With a «ruinously low» market, the *Intelligencer* cautioned their southern patrons that

«St. Louis cannot sell or consume all the sugar and molasses produced in Louisiana —particularly at this season of the year».

Despite such counsel, planters nevertheless faced few alternatives; with escalating debts they either sold on plantation, shipped to distant markets with higher freight costs, or consigned their sugars to a New Orleans factor, frequently the same commission merchant who forwarded the relevant supplies for the year's planting and lent his credit for capital acquisition, be it land, labor, or machinery. Moreover, for many cane planters on the Mississippi River, its tributaries, and Bayou Lafourche, the geographical proximity and relative ease of transport to New Orleans made it the preferred sugar market, irrespective of its many shortcomings. As such, from 1840 to 1860, between 45 and 60 percent of Louisiana's crop was sold on the New Orleans levee; the remainder sold to retail merchants in the country or shipped North. For those who sold their sugars locally, steam packets served most of the cane region, ploughing their way through the waterways of south Louisiana, linking relatively isolated settlements with the New Orleans levee front. Planter William Pugh underscored the centrality of the steam packets when he observed that from his plantation on Bayou Lafourche, he consistently succeeded in shipping his crop to market even during low water. With one steam packet that made daily trips to Donaldsonville on the Mississippi and a weekly steam service to New Orleans, Pugh noted that he usually paid between \$1.25 and \$2 to ship a hogshead of sugar to New Orleans and that after twelve years of marketing his sugar in such a manner, he could not recall ever charging his insurance companies a cent for damage during shipping. Not all producers were as sanguine about the excellence of Louisiana's packets or the ease of navigating through snags and accumulated drift-wood as Pugh, though the established river-borne transportation network effectively cemented the planters' ties with New Orleans. And critically, sugar producers like Pugh could accurately plan on sales and establish a rudimentary timetable for marketing their produce¹⁹.

¹⁹ «Maunsell White to Dunlop, Moncure, & Co.», 22 February 1845, Manusell White Papers, UNC; «St. Louis *Intelligencer*», 22 December 1852, quoted in *Southern Sentinel*, Plaquemine, 7 January 1853, and *Planters' Banner*, Franklin, 14 March 1850. For detailed records on marketing in St. Louis, see vol. 34. Estate Record Book, 1848-1855, Gay (Edward J.) & Family Papers, LSU. Annual volume of sugar marketed in New Orleans from J.C. SITTERSON [11], p. 194. On difficulties of transportation, see J.C. SITTERSON [11], p. 195; P.F. PASKOFF, «Hazard Removal on the Western Rivers as a Problem of Public Policy», *Louisiana History*, 40, Lafayette, 1999, pp. 261-82; D.J. MILLET, «The Saga of Water Transportation into Southwest Louisiana to 1900», *Louisiana History*, 15, Lafayette, 1974, pp. 339-56, and T.A. BECNEL, *The Barrow Family and the Barataria and*

For planters in western parts of the antebellum sugar country, transportation difficulties with New Orleans motivated many operators to freight their sugars directly to the Atlantic seaboard. Primarily located along the rich soils of Bayou Teche, planters in the westerly Attakapas region (St. Mary and St. Martin Parishes) increased production from almost 27,000 hogsheads in 1850 to 37,000 in 1855 and to 65,000 during the bumper 1861 harvest. Proportionally, the Attakapas produced between 12 and 16 percent of the entire Louisiana crop. And in 1860, census enumerators counted 84 major sugar planters in St. Mary Parish alone; these land and labor lords held on average over 100 slaves in bondage, they cultivated some 600 acres in cane (for grinding) and corn (for domestic consumption), and produced almost 260 hogsheads of sugar on each estate. All told, the Attakapas region was home to between 17 and 20 percent of Louisiana's largest sugar barons and a substantial zone of late antebellum cane farming. The entire region, however, was relatively isolated from the shipping traffic that navigated the Mississippi and its tributaries. Steamers ferried the route between Franklin on Bayou Teche and New Orleans, for instance, but the trip of 420 miles took four days as ships ran aground in low water, lost position during floods, and gingerly navigated through the lakes of the Atchafalaya swamplands. As one correspondent bluntly noted, the trials of shipping sugar from the Teche to New Orleans «are the next thing to martyrdom». From the mid-1820s, however, Bayou Teche was cleared of obstructions for steamboat navigation, converting the sluggish waters into a dynamic trade artery. Astute to their widening marketing opportunities, planters along the Teche followed Wade Hampton's example and freighted their sugars to distant markets along the Gulf and Atlantic seaboard. Sugar lords John Moore and William F. Weeks, for example, shipped their considerable crops to Charleston, Savannah, Baltimore, and Mobile, while John and William Palfrey of Ricahoc Plantation dispatched their sugars to New York, Philadelphia, Baltimore, and Richmond. Neighbors Moses Liddell and Francis Dubose Richardson of Bayside Plantation similarly kept a wary eye on domestic markets, conveying their sugars to the Northeast when the market favored it, or when specific debts fell due, or disposing of their crop with Western buyers when glutted markets promised poor remuneration. None of these planting concerns, however, entirely evaded the New Orleans market. The relatively lower freight costs of \$2 to \$3 per hogshead to New Orleans against \$5 for Philadelphia and

Lafourche Canal: The Transportation Revolution in Louisiana, 1829-1925, Baton Rouge, Louisiana State University Press, 1989, pp. 41-65. For examples and accounts of planters marketing their sugars through New Orleans, see «Accounts of James P. Bowman with W. & D. Urquhart», April 1855 to January 1857, Turnbull-Bowman Family Papers, LSU; Annual Sugar Sales for «Account Lewis Stirling with Factors Kelly, Conyngham & Co., Cammack, Squires, and West, A. Miltenberger & Co., W. & D. Urquhart», November 1850 to March 1860, Stirling (Lewis & Family) Papers, LSU, and «William Hewes to Andrew McCollam», July 1852 to November 1854, McCollam (Andrew & Ellen E.) Papers, UNC.

New York could, on occasion, erase any price advantage in the Eastern port cities. Whether on Weeks' Grand Côte plantation or along the Teche, slaves accordingly loaded consignments of sugar onto packets that steamed into the Atchafalaya and onto coastal schooners that departed for the pilot stations at the mouth of the Mississippi and thence to merchants in the Crescent City²⁰.

From the offices of Franklin's *Planters' Banner*, editors Robert Wilson and Daniel Dennett looked out over a thriving port. As they announced in 1851, «no inland southern town of the size presents the business, life-like appearance of Franklin». Northern produce in the local stores added lustre to the town's increasingly cosmopolitan identity, exemplified by its macadamized streets and vibrant docks. The shouts and laughs of the draymen hauling sugar hogsheads over those paved streets must have resonated through the late winter and spring months when planters dispatched their sugars to Franklin's quayside. Irish brogue mixed with English, German, and Creole French to create linguistic and racial dissonance on the wharves of Bayou Teche where free workers rubbed shoulders with the enslaved. Toiling among the jetties and piers, Franklin's waterfront workers encountered crews from across the nation, forging a dynamic (though no doubt occasionally violent) social space that spilt into local hostelries and the perhaps inevitable bragging, banter, and fights. As Mikhail Bakhtin observes, «the most intense and productive life of culture takes place on the boundaries». And on Franklin's antebellum quays, those boundaries were readily apparent, be they racial, linguistic, religious, cultural, ethnic, ideological, or political²¹.

²⁰ M.E. REED, «Footnote to the Coastwise Trade —Some Teche Planters and their Atlantic Factors», *Louisiana History*, n° 3, Lafayette, 1967, pp. 191-7; P.A. CHAMPOMIER [3], 1844-1845, 1850-1851, 1855-1856, 1861-1862; and J.K. MENN, *The Large Slaveholders of Louisiana —1860*, New Orleans, Pelican Books, 1964, pp. 7, and 376-89. Additionally, see R. FOLLETT and R. HALPERN, *Documenting the Louisiana Sugar Harvest, 1844-1877* (www.utoronto.ca/csus/sugar). On transportation difficulties, see J.L. DE GRUMMOND, «A Social History of St. Mary Parish, 1845-1860», *Louisiana Historical Quarterly*, 32, New Orleans, 1949, pp. 22 and 46. For examples of coastal services and 'interior' packets between New Orleans and the Attakapas, see *Planters' Banner*, Franklin, 6 December 1845. Trading information from: «William F. Weeks to John Moore», 13 May, 1852, and 4 January 1853; «Julius Johnson to John Moore», 12 March, 1852, and 23 December 1852; «J. Tupper & Son. to John Moore», 12 March 1856, and «W.H. Burroughs to John Moore», 18 March 1856, Weeks (David & Family) Papers, LSU; «Plantation Diary 1842-1859», vol. 17; William Palfrey and George D. Palfrey Account Books, Palfrey Family Papers, LSU; «Moses Liddell to Jackson, Todd & Co.», 19 March 1847; «Moses Liddell to St. John R. Liddell», 13 October 1847; 27 December 1847; 5 December, 1848, and 10 December 1851, and «Moses Liddell to Mary M. Liddell», 23 November 1851, Liddell (Moses, St. John R. & Family) Papers, LSU.

²¹ *Planters' Banner*, Franklin, 29 March 1851, quoted in J.L. DE GRUMMOND [20], pp. 19-23 and 52. On violence in Franklin's «grog shops», see *Planters' Banner*, Franklin, 6 June 1850, and V.W. MCGEE, *Speech Genres and Other Late Essays by M.M.Bakhtin*, Austin, University of Texas Press, 1986, p. 2 (ed. and trans. C. Emerson and M. Holquist). On drink, fighting, and working-class identity, see R. ROZENWEIG, *Eight Hours for What We Will: Workers and Leisure in an Industrial City*, Cambridge, UK: University of Cambridge Press, 1983, pp. 61-64, and P. WAY, «Labour's Love Lost: Observations on the Historiography of Class and Ethnicity in the Nineteenth

The stevedores, who frequented the taverns after stowing thousand pound hogsheads under deck, scrambled over brigs and ocean going schooners from Baltimore, New York, Boston, Mobile, Charleston, Richmond, and Philadelphia. While access to these markets satisfied even the most price-conscious sugar master, ships from Havana, Kingston, Bermuda, St. Croix, and Nassau also lay at anchor along Franklin's narrow wharves. Firmly integrated within the Atlantic sugar economy, the denizens of this small town watched the volume of trade reported at Franklin increase sharply during the antebellum era. In 1847 for instance, 71 coastwise vessels and 9 foreign registered ships entered the port of Franklin during the year. On the 70 ships that cleared the harbormaster and left Bayou Teche for the Gulf of Mexico, ship crews packed away 6,735 hogsheads of sugar, 1,671 barrels of molasses, and almost 31,000 feet of live oak timber. The following year, however, the *Planters' Banner* reported that 96 schooners and 29 brigs sailed into Franklin from port cities in the United States while 32 foreign vessels docked at the harbor wall. By New Year's Eve, 1848, 157 ships displacing 19,916 tons set their sails and left the com-mo-tion of Franklin where the 941 crewmen who visited the town during the year must have filled not only the local streets but also the coffers of saloon owners who stood to gain from their thirsty patrons. Conversing in a myriad of languages and accents, these crewmen stored in the holds of the ships, 16,589 hogsheads of sugar, 19,664 barrels of molasses, and over 55,000 feet of timber. By 1853, the port of Franklin reported 126 departures during the calendar year though the vessels that passed through the harbor gates weighed an average of 158 tons per ship, an increase of over 31 tons per vessel from 1848. While fewer, though larger, ships called at the port of Franklin, over 19,000 hogsheads of sugar and 41,194 barrels of molasses left the town for the Atlantic seaboard and Gulf coast markets. Intricately binding Bayou Teche with Battery Park in New York City, ship chandlers in Franklin outfitted a marketing operation that proved international in scope though one that rested firmly on the growing national demand for sugar²².

By the mid 1850s, the promise of a railroad link between New Orleans and the Attakapas seemingly promised a resolution to the planters' marketing diffi-

Century», *Journal of American Studies*, 28, Cambridge, UK, 1994, pp. 1-22. On the social significance of bragging see E.J. GORN, «'Gouge and Bite, Pull Hair and Scratch': The Social Significance of Fighting in the Southern Backcountry,» *American Historical Review*, 90, Durham, 1985, pp. 18-43, especially 28-33, and R.D.G. KELLEY, «Rethinking Black Working-Class Opposition in the Jim Crow South», *Journal of American History*, 80, Urbana, Ill., 1993, pp. 86-7. And on the cultural politics of black maritime workers, see W.J. BOLSTER, *Black Jacks: African American Seamen in the Age of Sail*, Cambridge, Mass., Harvard University Press, 1997, and D.S. CECELSKI, *The Waterman's Song: Slavery and Freedom in Maritime North Carolina*, Chapel Hill, University of North Carolina Press, 2001. Finally on waterfront politics, albeit for a later period, see E. ARNESEN, *Waterfront Workers of New Orleans: Race, Class, and Politics, 1863-1923*, Urbana, University of Illinois Press, 1994.

²² *Planters' Banner*, Franklin, 21 December 1848; 8 February 1849, and 5 January 1854, and J.L. DE GRUMMOND [20], p. 53.

culties. The New Orleans, Opelousas, and Great Western Railroad struck west from its terminus on the banks of the Mississippi at Algiers across sugar cane rich St. Charles and Lafourche Parish, before turning to the North and heading up Bayou Teche toward central portion of the state. To those who supported the NOOGWR, the rail link seemed to proffer wealth and a promising future that would speed western sugars to the New Orleans levee for \$2.50 per hogshhead. Predictably, the *Planters' Banner* did not shy from local boosterism, proclaiming that the railroad «will be the mainspring of a new spirit of enterprise [...] infused into the country». And for the first year of the railroads' incorporation, planters along the route invested some \$760,000 in private subscription. Construction, however, slowed and costs escalated as navvies labored on silty and geologically unstable soils. Hamstrung by the lack of sufficient funding and a perhaps overly grandiose scheme, the NOOGWR failed to attract adequate support. By 1857, private investors furnished only 20 percent of the construction costs. Of the three-quarters of a million dollars initially promised by rural planters residing along the railroad, just \$250,000 was actually paid. Once again, Louisiana planters failed to unite and invest in a co-operative exercise. As Moses Liddell well understood, the «enormous and continuous» expenses incurred in sugar production promoted an essentially individualistic outlook, but behind his opposition to the NOOGWR lay a deep suspicion of being 'nabobed over' by the New Orleans merchants a further time. The railroad, he wrote his son, «is more or less intended to promote the interest of New Orleans», by diverting trade there, and reducing the shipment of Teche sugars to the North. Every hogshhead of sugar passing through New Orleans, he added, «leaves a share of its value» in the hands of the merchant middlemen, whose commission (2 ½ percent on sales) rarely altered²³.

Liddell's unease at associationalism, be it in marketing his sugar or over internal improvements, was born of deep reticence to communal progress. As James Hanna cautioned fellow planters:

«There is probably no interest in the United States, of the same importance, so much neglected by those engaged in its culture, or so much preyed upon [...] as the sugar interest of Louisiana; and there is probably none which so much requires combined energy and care in the promotion of its interests. While all

²³ On railroad building, see M.E. REED, *New Orleans and the Railroads: The Struggle for Commercial Empire, 1830-1860*, Baton Rouge, Louisiana State University Press, 1966; «A Century of Progress in Louisiana, 1852-1952», *Southern Pacific Bulletin*, S. Diego, October 1952, pp. 1-55, and W. PRICHARD (ed.), «A Forgotten Louisiana Engineer: G. W. R. Bayley and his 'History of the Railroads of Louisiana'», *Louisiana Historical Quarterly*, 30, New Orleans, 1947, pp. 1065-85. For a contemporary description, see *Planters' Banner*, Franklin, 7 March 1850, and 6 February 1851; *Report of the President and Directors of the New Orleans, Opelousas, and Great Western Railroad Company to the Stockholders, at their First Annual Meeting, 24th January, 1853*, New Orleans, J.B. Steel, 1853, p. 10, and «Moses Liddell to St. John R. Liddell», 15 November 1846, and 14 September 1851, Liddell (Moses, St. John R. & Family) Papers, LSU.

other branches of industry are cared for by the associated efforts of those engaged in them, we are content to let the sugar interest float along on the current of daily events, and let it take its chance for good or ill, giving ourselves, collectively, very little concern about it».

Yet despite such admonition, the slaveholding barons rarely collaborated for their mutual good. Receiving his sales account, the sugar planter, one columnist added,

«Wonders at the state of the market, sits down[,] swears some —same old story— market down [...] and after a long drawn sigh, concludes —‘There is no balm in Gilead’».

Like Jeremiah’s lament, there was no healing of the planters’ woes either. Although they could not adequately supply the domestic sugar market and faced overlapping difficulties in competing with their Caribbean rivals, Louisiana’s plantocracy nevertheless shouldered some of the responsibility for their vulnerable position. Not infrequently, they glutted markets with sugars, competing with one another to freight their produce at the earliest convenience, and suppressed prices by marketing en masse. To be fair, they had few alternatives given the pressing demands of their creditors, their lack of detailed commercial information, and the allegedly wayward advice of New Orleans’ merchant community. Yet, when given the opportunity to act in unison, be it the Louisiana sugar mart or the Attakapas railroad, the planting community failed to protect their long-term interests. The volatility of sugar production, in this northern outcrop of the Caribbean cane world, certainly mitigated against far-reaching economic forecasting and the planters’ relative isolation and prosperity both hindered the formation of alliances and concurrently lessened their need. Given the vagaries of the crop, climate, and market, the planters’ self-absorbed and independent commercialism proved relatively prudent, though their social ethic ultimately restrained progress in Louisiana’s cane world. As Frederick Law Olmsted tellingly noted,

«There was certainly progress and improvement at the South [...] but it was much more limited, and less calculated upon than at the North».

Pressing his point further, the travelling New Yorker deduced that there was «no *atmosphere* of progress and improvement». By contrast, «there was a constant electric current of progress» in the North, but in the South, «every second man was a non-conductor and broke the chain». Louisiana’s slaveholding sugar lords proved no different; raised in a culture that privileged individualism, personal integrity, social standing, and human mastery, southern planters were ill-disposed to cede their independence to any-one or any group. Ideologically and culturally bound to the social values of slaveholding, Louisiana’s plantocracy

maintained that personal liberty rested on economic autonomy and the virulent protection of one's property rights. The realities of business suggested otherwise, with independent planters exercising remarkably little leverage over the market, but as Jeffrey Young has recently argued, southern slavemasters often viewed their lives through a fictive lens by which they banished the gross truths of antebellum life and dwelled on their idealized role as masters. Louisiana's elite developed a commercial corollary to this social ethic, one that condoned independent market behavior, but truncated nineteenth-century notions of associationalism and progress. The sugar barons accordingly hoisted themselves upon a petard of their own making; committed to independence, they denied the possibilities of collectivism, and toiled in the sugar market as individuals. Buffeted by icy winds from the North, troubled by Congressional tariff debates, and overwhelmed by Caribbean competition, Louisiana's cane lords found themselves stranded and alone, culturally ill-prepared to confront the market²⁴.

Before the United States Civil War, Louisiana's sugar production grew from barely noticeable amounts to 264.000 Tons due to an increase in both domestic consumption and output capacity. It proved unable, however, to counteract the expansion of Caribbean exports. This study contends that the slave-owning «hacendados» had to operate in a very dynamic market in which they were culturally ill-prepared to compete. Their ethics based on individualism and sense of independence deriving from their slave-owning condition, was an obstacle for associative efforts. Thus they acted on an article-by-article trade strategy, causing demand saturation and price dumping which led to the weakening of their individual and collective position in the sugar trade.

KEY WORDS: Louisiana, 19th Century, sugar, slavery, market, plantation, social ethic, businessman.

²⁴ «Sugar Planters' Convention-Circular», *De Bow's Review*, 20, New Orleans, 1856, p. 226, and *The Sugar Planter*, Port Allen, 23 January 1858. On the Balm of Gilead, see Jeremiah 8: 22, F.L. OLMSTED [4], pp. 274-5, and J.R. YOUNG [4], pp. 133 and 168-170. On the planters' social ethic, additionally see B. WYATT-BROWN, *Southern Honor: Ethics and Behavior in the Old South*, New York, Oxford University Press, 1982, and *The Shaping of Southern Culture: Honor, Grace, and War, 1760s-1880s*, Chapel Hill, University of North Carolina Press, 2001; K.S. GREENBERG, *Masters and Statesmen: The Political Culture of American Slavery*, Baltimore, Johns Hopkins University Press, 1985; S.M. STOWE, *Intimacy and Power in the Old South: Ritual in the Lives of the Planters*, Baltimore, Johns Hopkins University Press, 1987, and the cited B. Wyatt-Brown's book, For the debate over southern distinctiveness, see P. KOLCHIN, *A Sphinx on the Land: The Nineteenth-Century South in Comparative Perspective*, Baton Rouge, Louisiana State University Press, 2003, and I. WALLERSTEIN, «What Can One Mean by Southern Culture?», N.V. BARTLEY (ed.), *The Evolution of Southern Culture*, Athens, University of Georgia Press, 1988, pp. 1-13.