**CARIBBEAN ECONOMY AND SLAVERY**

***The Economic Revolution***

**The Sugar Revolution**

**Definition:** A rapid change from tobacco to sugar as the basic cash crop that occurred in the mid-to-late 17th century in the British and French West Indians islands. The sugar revolution brought great social, economic and political changes to the islands it occurred in. It is most drastically seen in the history of Barbados where it occurred roughly in one decade (1640- 1650).

**Causes of the Sugar Revolution:**

1. For a long time, tobacco from the West Indies had been preferred. However, by the 17c., tobacco from the West Indies was facing competition from tobacco from Virginia in North America, which was superior in quality and quantity.

2. There was an increasing demand for sugar in Europe to be used as a sweetener for teas and other beverages.

3. The Caribbean islands have favourable climatic conditions on which sugar could be grown.

4. There was a glut on the market so the price of tobacco fell.

**Social changes:**

1. The black population increased with the importation of African slaves to produce sugar.
2. The white population decreased as the whites returned to Europe or moved onto other islands because they did not want to work alongside the blacks.
3. Society changed from a free citizenry to a slave society as the Africans were enslaved on the plantations and the small number of whites ruled society. ‘’Free’’ meant ‘’white’’’ and ‘’slave’’ meant ‘’black’’.
4. Absenteeism (practice of owning land in one country but living in another) became a feature of West Indian society as planters owned plantations in the West Indies but lived in Europe.

**Economic changes:**

1. The price of land inflated.
2. The number of landholders decreased. Small land owners were put out of business and small plots of land could not accommodate the amount of sugar cane necessary. Many small holdings were grouped together into large estates, under the ownership of a rich planter.
3. The number of landholdings increased as sugar could only be grown economically on large estates.
4. Monoculture (the concentration on the cultivation of a single crop) became the backbone of the Caribbean economy as sugar became the main crop that was relied upon. This was a dangerous foundation for the Caribbean economy which would eventually lead to much distress.

**Political changes:**

The Proprietorship System of Government was replaced by The Old Representative System of Government. The Old Representative system of government had a governor and an assembly. Barbados had its assembly set up in 1639. This was the first parliament to be established in the West Indies. The planter- class ruled the assembly and made the decisions as they held many seats.

It is said that the Dutch made the West Indies ‘’black’’ as they provided the labourers from Africa and put up the capital needed by the planters to set up production.

**Change from Logwood to Mahogany**

Logwood was the first major timber export from the Caribbean and was produced mainly in Belize. It was very valuable for its dye, which was used by wood manufacturers. Spanish ships carrying logwood were often attacked by British pirates, who stole the cargo and resold it. However, the buccaneers soon decided that cutting the logwood trees themselves was an easier way and safer way to make a profit. These new producers caused a glut on the market. This resulted in falling prices in the 1760’s and so mahogany replaced logwood as Belize’s main wood export. Since mahogany wood was harder than logwood, the economy of Belize (renamed British Honduras after it was colonized by Britain) changed drastically. Logwood was a small tree which required only a few men to cut it.

Slavery started in Belize in 1724 but there were relatively few Africans until the 1770’s after which the number of Africans expanded to more than three quarters of the population of about 5 000 people. Mahogany production created new jobs. eg, as huntsmen, the axe men and cattle men and these jobs were done by skilled slaves. The huntsmen went into the forest to find mahogany trees, the axe men did the chopping and trimming of the trees, and the cattle men took care of the animals used to transport the logs. These enslaved men, their masters and overseers had to cover long distances to find the trees, which did not grow in clumps like the logwood but were located singly and often far apart. This meant that sites were temporary and that enslaved men were away from their families for long period of time so logging had to be seasonal. After the logging season ended, families were reunited and celebrations took place at the community festivals where the enslaved interacted with each other. This interaction among the enslaved created a new Belizean creole culture.

***The Coming of the Africans***

The most important change occurred as a result of the sugar revolution was a need for a large amount of skilled labour that was not available in the West Indies.

The first source of labour which Europeans experimented with was that of the Amerindians. Under the **Encomienda** and **Repartimiento** systems many natives lost their lives. The genocide of these indigenous peoples meant that Europeans were forced to seek alternative sources of labour. They turned to the indentureship system. Poor whites were attracted to West Indian plantations to perform manual labour. They too proved unsuccessful as these indentured servants were unaccustomed to plantation life. As a result, another source was necessary.

**Why African Slavery?**

* The main religion practiced by Europeans during this period was Christianity. Europeans were predominately Roman Catholics. The British however were Anglicans. Europeans believed it was their God- given duty to convert non- Christians. In addition, it was believed that Africans were direct descendants of Ham (one of Noah’s sons) who was condemned to a life of servitude. Europeans believed Africans/ blacks were made to be slaves. Bartholomew de Las Casas suggested the use of African slaves.
* Slavery already existed in Africa. Persons were made slaves for debts, punishment, crimes, marriages, etc. making it easy to access the large numbers required. Europeans felt that they were not introducing anything new into Africa so there was nothing wrong with what they were doing.
* Sugar was now the major export commodity of the West Indies and demanded a large labour force.
* Slavery was seen as a ‘’necessary evil’’ because for sugar cultivation and manufacture to be profitable, a large, readily available, and cheap labour supply was essential.
* The Amerindian population had declined so the indigenous population could not provide an adequate labour force.
* Africans were available in large numbers.
* Planters saw a cost advantage in the use of African slaves. An African purchased was a slave for life and the children of slaves became the properties of their masters.
* Africans were skilled agriculturists and accustomed to manual labour in a tropical climate. The Caribbean and Africa had similar tropical climates.
* Africa is closer to the Caribbean than Europe and the Trans-Atlantic voyage was assisted by the trade winds blowing east to west.
* As the plantation system developed planters no longer wanted to give prime sugar land as incentives to attract indentured servants and so they began to rely more heavily on African slaves, since there was no need to give them land.

**A look at West African Societies before the arrival of the Europeans**

Slavery existed in West Africa long before the Europeans arrived in 1515 for debt, as punishment, and as sacrifice. West African societies were very diverse, prosperous and consisting of states at various stages of development. Africa maybe divided in two main regions:

**The Savannah States (Ghana, Mali, Songhai)**

This are consisted of fertile grass land and was ideal for farming, agriculture and cattle and goat rearing. Weaving, leather making, and crafting were also popular means of earning a living.

Trade to the north was also very profitable and goods such as salt, gold, ivory, kola nuts as well as European and Asian goods were the basis of this trade which soon expanded to include slaves. This trade led to the transformation of small settlements into large cities, along government and powerful empires. Thus there was a need for administrators, accountants, law enforcers, tax collectors and merchants.

**Political Organization**

During the 15c., when the trade in African slaves was in existence, the Songhai Empire was ruling. Before the rise of this empire, the Mali Empire had been the major Savannah Empire. The Mali had been taken over another thriving empire- Ghana Empire. These powerful empires had arisen because of the revenue gained from the high taxes. Which the merchants were required to pay the rulers for passing through their lands.

**The Forest States (Oyo, Benin, Dahome, Asante)**

The forest states were increasing in status shortly before the arrival of the Europeans. Slaves were taken almost fully from this region due to its proximity to the coast. The people in these areas were generally agriculturist planting yam, cassava, bananas and rearing small animals such as chickens, pigs and fowls. The forest provided an abundance of fruits, river teemed with fish and hunting was practiced. There were also potters, weavers, sculptors, mines and metal workers. Initially these people practiced small scale trading but later provided the north with Ebony, Leopard skin, and Pepper. Their wealth grew and industries thrived as a result of the slave trade.

**Political Organization**

By the time the slave trade began there were no vast empires in the forest region like those of the savannah. Each forest state had its own unique pattern of government. The Yoruba people were one of the most organized in the forest region. They were many towns which served as centres for trade. In every town could be found farmers, priests and craftsmen. Each town was a small kingdom ruled by a king or Obah who controlled the neighbouring forest lands. The Edo people lived in the state of Benin. The rulers of Benin called themselves Obas of Benin because they copied from the Yoruba people. However, the Obas of Benin were more powerful than those of the Yoruba. The state of Benin was situated at end of the busy trade roots leading to the savannah town. The kings gained a lot of riches by taxing the merchants. Before the arrival of the Europeans the Edo merchants sold ivory, pepper and ebony. The merchants also sold cloth and jewelry.

**Religion in West African Societies**

Between AD 1000 and 1500 Islam spread from the Mediterranean into the Sudanic belt, the region of Africa which lies to the south of the Sahara Desert. Then the empires of Sudan, Islam was carried into the forest zone to the south where it competed with tribal religions and finally into conflict with ancestor worship and each tribe was united into the common worship of tribal gods who were often mythical. In Kingdoms such as Benin and Oyo the immediate ancestors of kings were seen as gods. Each god had a specialized function but all were responsible for fertility of their followers, fetishism, or the harnessing of impersonal forces of the universe by incarnations and charms was prevalent everywhere.

**A comparison between the Forest and Savannah States**

* Both were traders and agriculturists, but in the savannah a great use of currency (cowry shell, gold) was employed.
* Hunting existed in both regions but was more popular in the forest states.
* They both had organized systems of government.
* Trade was better developed in the savannah, building and construction was more advanced and printing was practiced.

**Areas from which slaves were taken**

Slaves were taken mainly from West Africa. Slaves were taken from the forest states (Oyo, Benin, Dahome, and Asante). They came from that section of West Africa stretching from the Senegal River in the north to the Congo River in the south. The various areas along the West African Coast have been given different names, eg. Grain Coast, Ivory Coast, Gold Coast, and Slave Coast.

**Methods used to acquire Slaves**

* Slaves were sold at auction to the highest bidder.
* Slave scramble. In a slave scramble, Africans were divided into groups for which set prices were fixed. At a signal, the planters rushed on board to assess which groups offered the best quality for the least money.

**How slaves were captured and their journey to the coast**

The slaves were captured in tribal wars or raids on villages. Boys and men between the ages of sixteen and forty were sought especially. Old persons, women and children were left behind or killed in the raids. Those captured were marched to the coast. The slaves were assembled in coffles and were often chained together. Speed was essential as a captain was waiting at the coast for the slaves. Those who did not keep up were left behind or punished.

**Methods used to capture slaves**

* Surprise attacks- The slave raiders often used the element of surprise. Africans were ambushed and kidnapped as they worked or travelled away from the community. Under such conditions they would have been outnumbered with little chance of escaping or calling for help. As people ran from their burning homes many were grabbed and taken away.
* The use of trickery- Sometimes slave hunters enticed people to go with them promising to take them to exciting new places and to see many wonderful things. Some Africans went willingly only to be captured and forced to make a trip away from their home.
* Tribal differences- The animosity which often existed between the tribes was exploited by the slave traders. Whereas Africans would’ve been reluctant to sell a member of their own tribe. They usually would’ve been more willing to sell a member of the enemies’ tribe. Enemies captured during tribal warfare were therefore sold to the Europeans.

**Items used as a medium of exchange for slaves**

The items used as a medium of exchange for slaves include knives, guns, alcohol, beads, cloth, and silk.

**What happened to the slaves as they arrived at the coast?**

When the slaves arrived at the coast, slave quarters called baracoons were ready to receive them. The initial examination of the slaves took place outside the baracoons which were as dark dungeons. Usually the ship surgeon examines them on the beach. They were stripped naked and placed into two groups: the sound ones and the rejects. The rejected ones had ailments. The sound ones were branded on the chest with a red hot iron, signifying the country that they will be shipped to. The slave sales then came. After, the slaves were placed on board ships waiting to be transported to the New World.

**The organization of the Trans- Atlantic Slave Trade**

The organization of the slave trade was placed in the hand of a company which was given the sole right by a particular nation to trade in slaves on the coast of West Africa, to erect and maintain forts necessary for the protection of the trade and transport and sell slaves in the West Indies. Individuals, that is free traders or interlopers, were excluded.

The British established the Company of Royal Adventurers trading to Africa in 1663 and replaced it in 1672 by the Royal African Company. The French established the French West Indian Company in 1673 and in 1674 it was transferred to the Senegal Company. The Dutch trade was given the name Dutch West Indian Company in 1621.

These slaves trading companies established trading forts called factors. Factors were in charge of these forts. The responsibility of these factors was to purchase slaves from the Africans and to keep them in baracoons, they were also responsible for overseeing the large complex credit system. The slave trade was one side of the triangular trade linking Europe, West Africa and the Americas. The trip from Europe was the first leg of the triangular trade. The traders involved in this leg of the trade had to ensure that they had the financial support of the national company or the sponsorship of independent private people before they set out to obtain slaves in Africa. This sponsorship included the provision of suitable ships, adequate crew, supplies of food and water, proper insurance coverage against loss at sea from pirate attacks, in addition to manufactured goods to exchange in Africa.

Ships left the European ports (Bristol and Liverpool) carrying textiles, guns and other metal goods to forts exchanged for slaves who were taken to Bridgetown, Barbados and Kingston, Jamaica. On the return journey from the Caribbean to England, they carried sugar on the return journey.

**The Middle Passage**

The Middle Passage refers to the journey across the Atlantic Ocean from the coast of West Africa to the New World. During the period of slavery this journey lasted from 6 weeks to 3 months. The duration depended on the weather and the exact distance to be covered.

Many slaves saw the ocean for the first time when they arrived on the coast after their first capture. The sound of water and the sight of the huge vessel riding at anchor filled them with great fear and amazement. Their fear increased when they were made to board the vessel and saw Europeans for the first time. According to Equiano ‘’I was now persuaded that they were going to kill me.’’ The different complexion and strange language spoken by the Europeans only served to confirm the belief in the minds of Africans that they would be killed.

When the ship started on its journey the slaves were packed in the hold of the ship without even sufficient room to turn. The heat in the hold of the ship was overbearing due to the fact that the ship always travelled in the tropics. It was made worse by the usual overcrowding. The air in the hold soon became unfit for breathing. There was the stench of filth, perspiration and vomit. Disease spread easily under these conditions and the groans of the dying could sometimes be heard. The slaves often suffered from circulatory problems brought up from lying all day in the same position. To reduce this effect, the slaves were brought up on deck one day for exercise. While on deck the slaves were always closely guarded to prevent them from jumping overboard. As an added precaution nettings were placed along the sides of the vessel. Despite these measures however, a few slaves did jump into the ocean. Some of them may have hoped to swim back to Africa, whilst others would have looked forward to the after- life, preferring death to the misery aboard the ship. For those who jumped overboard and caught, the punishment was severe.

**Arrival in the West Indies**

On arrival the New World the slaves were physically weak and mentally depressed. If sold immediately the slave captains would only have obtained a low price for them. To ensure a good price, they sometimes allowed the slaves a few days of fresh air to refresh themselves. They were fed fresh fruits to improve their skin tone and carbohydrates and protein to increase weight and strength. Just before the sale the slaves were oiled in an effort to give them a healthy glow.

**Effects of the slave trade on West Africa**

* The removal of millions of people about twenty-one million
* Destruction of African communities
* Encouraged inter-tribal conflict
* Destroyed African families
* Affected the technological advancement of West Africa

**Plantation Society**

**Plantation** Society: The rigidly stratified system of social and economic relations enforced on plantations in the Americas.

**Divisions among slaves**

At the top of the slave social ladder were the domestic slaves. They were then followed by the artisan or skilled slaves. The field slaves or praedial slaves were at the bottom of the slave social ladder. The slaves used mainly skin tone and the type of work they did as factors to determine their social status. Other factors included leadership skills, age, treatment which they enjoyed on the estate, and personal possessions.

**Divisions among whites**

The planters or attorneys were at the top of the social ladder of the whites. They were followed by the overseers, bookkeepers, and indentured servants. The whites used education, family background and wealth as factors to determine their social status.

**Occupations**

***Whites***

* Planning estate work.
* Supervising labour
* Administrating punishment
* Teaching the slaves skills

***Coloureds***

* Nannies
* Cooks
* Domestic Slaves

***Blacks***

* Carpenters
* Black- Smiths
* Taylors
* Factory workers
* Wheel rights
* Coopers
* Masons
* Prepare and harvest plants

**Reasons why free coloureds had less status than whites**

* They were descendants of Black slaves.
* They were less wealthy than whites and so were disadvantaged when it came to holding certain positions in society.
* They were generally less educated than whites.

**What factors were used by whites to determine slaves’ social status?**

* Their skills (carpenters, coopers, masons)
* Strength (muscular build, size)
* Age (youthfulness)
* Health
* Leadership qualities
* Country/ place of birth
* Complexion
* Special medicinal skills
* Degree of loyalty which they demonstrated to their masters

**What privileges were enjoyed by whites on the estate?**

* Better jobs
* Better living quarters
* Better food
* Payment
* Respected
* Had rights to bear arms
* More educated
* Right to vote
* They could influence political decisions as they were members of parliament
* Visit their homeland

**Privileges enjoyed by coloured slaves (mulattos)**

* Some lived in the Great House (basement)
* Generally better fed than blacks
* Had access to books and could read
* Better dressed than blacks

**Organization of the Sugar Plantation**

Sugar estate lands were divided into:

1. Sugarcane fields
2. Pasture lands (animals)
3. Woodlands (building slave huts & fuel for boiling houses)
4. Vegetable gardens (vegetables for whites)
5. Provision grounds (where slaves got their food to sell)
6. Work yards
7. Living quarters

**Buildings on the Sugar Plantations and their use**

* The Mill- grinding/crushing of cane to make sugar.
* Boiling House- cane was clarified by heating with white lime, cane juice evapourated, leaving a mixture of sugar crystals and molasses.
* Curing House- for weeks excess molasses dipped through small holes at the bottom of the hogsheads leaving muscavado sugar behind.
* Distillery (Still House)- molasses skimmed of cane juice was converted into rum.
* Trash House- crushed cane was stored here to be used as fuel
* Work Shops- this is where skilled craftsmen made barrels, carts, wagons, etc.
* Great House- largest house on the estate, house of the planter and his family, easy access to the road, usually stood on top of a hill where all could be seen.
* Overseers and book-keepers’ quarters- used for living by the overseers and book-keepers and also as offices.
* Slave Huts- no real architecture, small and just enough to sleep in
* Store House- supplies, tools, chemicals
* Hospital- ‘’Hot House’’, where sick slaves were taken care of
* G A O L- where slaves were punished

**SUGAR PRODUCTION PROCESS**

* **Cultivating/ planting:** The field slaves prepared the land for cultivation at the end of August. The slaves dug the holes, put animal manure in them, then placed cane cuttings called ratoons and lightly covered them with soil. The canes were planted just before the rainy season, as they grew, the slaves weeded the fields, molded (refilled the holes with soil that was removed). The canes removed the dry trash from the cane stock. The canes took 14- 18 months to mature.
* **Harvesting:** When the canes were ripe the slaves, armed with machetes and cutlasses, cut the canes and removed the outer leaves. The reaped canes were then tied into bundles and transported to the mill in carts or wagons within 48 hours to prevent deterioration of the sucrose content.

**MANUFACTURING OF SUGAR**

After the canes were unloaded they were fed by hand into the mill, which consisted of three pairs of rotating iron rollers. Here the canes were crushed and the juice was extracted. The extracted juice was conveyed by a gutter from the mill to the boiling house where it was emptied into the copper clarifier called the syphon where it was heated with white lime. The impurities rose as scum to the surface and were skimmed off and put aside to be used in the making of rum. The head boiler ladled the purified juice into successive boilers where it was boiled. There were about three to six boilers, each smaller and hotter than the previous one, hung over a fire. As the hot juice passed through the boilers it was constantly stirred by the slaves until it became thick and dark brown in colour. After it boiled for some time, the head boiler tested its readiness by stretching the mixture between his thumb and forefinger. This is the crystallization process. The sugar crystals mixed with molasses were ladled into large troughs to cool. After the sugar had cooled, it was placed on sloping platforms for about three weeks to allow the molasses to drain off. The molasses was collected and later used in the making of rum. The sugar which remained in the barrels was called muscovado. The barrels were sealed and ready for shipment. The sealed barrels of sugar crystals were loaded onto carts and taken to the coast. They were loaded and rolled onto the canoes which took them to the waiting ships. On arrival in Europe the sugar was further refined on one of the chief ports. This process made the sugar crystals finer.

***African Cultural Forms in the Caribbean up to 1838***

**Religion**Though the planters tried to stifle the indigenous religion, much culture retention occurred. The slaves held on to their beliefs and practices as much as and where possible. Here are some of them:

- Life after death

- The spirit world: duppies or ghosts

- The forces of good and evil and the constant struggle between the two

- That the dead is still a part of the community

- Two types of magic. Obeah - used to inflict hurt or harm and Myalism used to promote life, love,  
   health and success. Both involved the use of herbs, oils, potions etc.,

- A lot of music and dance in their expressions of worship

- Ancestral spirits and that one can actually make contact with them and that they are constantly  
  watching over us.

- Chanting of songs.

- Gods of nature- rain, thunder, lightning and fertility

- Highest respect for Mother earth

**How did these religious practices and belief manage to survive the restrictions of slavery?**

**a.** There were done in secret and late at nights. **b.** Some plantation owners used obeahmen as supplements to doctors. This was intended to be a cost effective measure but provided the slaves with the opportunity to pass down herbal secrets and practices of their forefathers. **c.** Others used or allow the obeahmen to continue his practice as a means of driving fear in the slaves. **d.** The slaves conducted their own funeral services and so the tradition and practices were preserved with each successive funeral that they performed. Of course, the planter did not attach any significance to these ceremonies so he did not attend them. His absence gave the slaves the opportunity to do their own thing and so preserve their heritage.  
  
**e.** The slaves used their own language when communicating. This includes the language of the drums and other musical instruments. As more slaves were bought and brought to the estates, the languages revived. Firstly, mortality rate was very high on the estates. This meant that the planters had to constantly buy new slaves. Though he tried to buy slaves from different areas, the reality was that most planters liked to buy     slaves from a particular area of the West African coast because they were known for their hard work and industrial skills.    **f.** The slaves were given some amount of leniency at Christmas time in particular. **g.** They managed to mix and hide their religion within the established faith. For example, Pocomania is a mixture of the Roman Catholic faith and the African religion.

**Food**The slaves had to prepare their own meals. They did it the way they were taught back home in Africa. Also the fact that they were allowed to grow their own provisions meant that they were able to choose what to grow- example yam, coco, dasheen etc., They continued their culinary skills. Trinidadian slaves had the luxury of beans and palm oils as they would have had in Africa.

**Dress**   
They were given either two suits of clothing per year or the equivalent yards of **osnaburg**. This is a type of rough khaki also called guinea blue or dutch stripes. The women would wrap their themselves with the cloth the way they would have in Africa to form dress or skirts. And of course they did not forget their ‘tie head'

**Language**   
The slaves came from different areas and ethnic groups in West Africa and so spoke different languages. This forced them to create a new tongue we now know as patois. But several African words survived.

**Music and Dance**   
They had all sorts of songs, work or digging songs as we have learnt, love songs, songs of sorrow, songs of joy and so on. In fact, it seems as if they had a song for every occasion just as they had a proverb to fit every situation. Their music had a lot of rhythm and beat. It involved the use of instruments such as:**Tambourines, Banjos, Flutes, Rattles, and Xylophones**.

Their dance had a lot of movement and passion, involving gyration of the hip and pelvic areas and the shaking of the rear. This was seen as vulgar by many of the whites, though secretly they were aroused by it, no wonder they understood its sexual importance and described it as debauchery. Types of dance included Dinkie, Minnie, Kumina, and Brukins.