

Instructions: Compose a 150 word minimum discussion post on the following discussion topics. The questions given in the discussion topics do not need to be answered it is just to be used as a guide to create a discussion post. This is for a class that is focused on the history of food in early Europe. I have attached the reading for the 2nd Discussion topic but for the first you can just google the source provided. You don't have to read the whole thing just enough to create a 150 word discussion post for each of the 2 topics.

Discussion 1

In *Candide* (1759), Voltaire's great Enlightenment-era satirical novella, the titular hero encounters a slave missing one leg and one arm, lying on a roadside in South America. The slave says, "When we work in the sugar mills and catch our fingers in the grinder, they cut off our hand. When we try to escape, they cut off our leg. I've had both punishments. It is at this price that you eat sugar in Europe." [1]

In this unit, we have seen how the production and trade of sugar played a role in the development of global capitalism. Much of this new global economy hinged on a new form of agricultural production, the plantation, in colonies in the new world where most of the work was done by enslaved people from Africa. These slaves, unlike slavery in earlier periods, were dehumanized and treated as commodities (goods traded in large quantities around the world). Mintz argues that slave plantations first developed the "division of labor," which would later form the foundation of the Industrial Revolution in Britain, enabling factory workers to be more efficient and less skilled. Their labor was seen as a commodity to be purchased at the lowest possible price, which decreased as workers' food was increasingly replaced with cheap tea, coffee, and sugar. Meanwhile European empires used all means necessary to force other parts of the world to trade with them and to provide cheap (and often unfree) labor. For instance, the British smuggled opium into China, devastating the population and economy there, provoking a war that ended with China agreeing to trade with Britain (with very favorable terms for the British). Many impoverished Chinese workers left in search of work overseas, such as those who built the railroads that brought the Western United States into the global economy.

Capitalism is frequently equated with freedom. "Free labor," "free markets," and "free trade" are all key concepts in capitalist economics. From the point of view of middle-class, white Europeans and Americans, increased freedom and prosperity did seem to be the primary effects of capitalism. Slavery, violence, exploitation, racism, and drug trafficking, all have been seen as outdated and unfortunate anomalies in the history of capitalism. But to what extent were these practices actually created by and central to the foundations of modern global capitalism? To what extent is the global economy *still* abusing and exploiting people? Does it really bring freedom to everyone? At what price do we "eat sugar" (or have iPhones, cheap clothes, etc.) in wealthy countries, and who is paying that cost?

Sources:

[1] Voltaire, *Candide with Related Documents* (Boston: Bedford/St. Martins, 2016), 81.

Discussion 2

A. C. Carmichael, "Domestic Manners..."

Primary Source Discussion Thread

By Danialle Dorsey

Mrs. Carmichael came from the upper end of the social spectrum of the Scots in the Caribbean, she lived in the town where she was "regularly supplied with all the fruits, roots, vegetables, poultry, eggs, pork, and also goat" by slaves (p. 180). She made many racial slurs or comments throughout her book, *Domestic Manners*.

In this chapter, the author describes how life is like on the plantation for black people in the West Indies in the 1820's. In the book, they had a provision garden attached to their houses. In these gardens, they planted plantains, yams, variety of peas, turnips, Christophine, and herbs. The yams are planted the same way as English potatoes but are used very differently than the English potatoes. The Christophine, are just like pears but bigger and are used in soups. They sold these provisions for money, anywhere from 2 sterling's to 10 sterling's. It is easier to grow these crops when the soil is wet and the temperature outside is warm rather than the soil being all dried up, when it is harder for crops to grow. So, they decided to grow as many as they can during the right seasons. The people save their money as much as they can and only eat twice a day because of this. What I found the most interesting and revealing in this work was when during Christmas, "all head people receive 3lbs. of pork, 8lbs, of flour or rice, two quarts of sugar, and a bottle of rum" (p.192). Although, the slaves get food twice a day by paying from the earning they get selling their provisions, this is what they receive as a gift during Christmas.

Discussion Questions:

1. What kinds of foods were slaves able to produce on their lands that are similar to what we eat in modern day time?
2. Why did the black population often barter their provisions?
3. Carmichael presents her book as a truthful account of what she experienced while being on the plantation, not a political argument. Yet it was written around the same time that slavery was being debated and abolished in the British Empire. So, how could Carmichael's point of view or this broader historical context have influenced her descriptions of plantations?