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Rice: Global Networks and New Histories ed. by Francesca
Bray et al. (review)

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economic security allowed the wealthy planters who dominated cotton production to further consolidate their political mastery in the Jim Crow South. Both possibilities are unexplored, although the latter would have better suited the sensibilities of New Orleans businessmen.

The Cotton Kings concludes by conjuring C. Vann Woodward and challenging inherited histories presenting “white men in the South, especially rich and powerful ones, working against progressive reform” (p. 143). Yet more recent scholarship would suggest that progressivism and social conservatism were hardly irreconcilable positions for the self-defined patriarchs of the Jim Crow South. Condemnable men contributed to beneficial change, hence the dilemma posed by this “unusual story.” For portraying the clash between New Orleans bulls and New York bears with precision and style, it deserves wide readership. But its tarnished heroes demand a far more critical eye.

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Francesca Bray, Peter A. Coclanis, Edda L. Fields-Black, and Dagmar Schafer, eds. *Rice: Global Networks and New Histories*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2015. 445 pp. ISBN-13 978-1-107-62237-1, \$34.99 (paper).

This volume adds to the growing body of scholarly and popular literature on individual foods. These biographies of an ingredient or dish typically trace its history and meaning, contextualize it within a cuisine or culture, or analyze its impact on global events and trends. Most of these publications illustrate how to “read” a food to understand the culture surrounding it, or vice versa, but only a few explore the processes of research and interpretation involved in this exploration. Grounded in the discipline of history, this multidisciplinary volume successfully introduces and problematizes current historiographical methods and theories along with debates about this important food, allowing readers to see into the workings of scholarly research and discussions.

Rice is a significant staple in many cuisines and has played a pivotal role in international trade and in the economies and societies of a number of nations. That it is worthy of study should be obvious to

any educated reader. This collection affirms the importance of rice and introduces some of the issues surrounding it that rice historians grapple with. The book also introduces those issues to nonhistorians and nonspecialists in rice, neatly summarizing previous research, findings, and the debates around interpreting that scholarship. The articles are as international as rice itself, with both in-depth and comparative studies across the globe, including China, Japan, Indonesia, the Mekong Delta in southeast Asia, North America, particularly the Southeast and old Southwest, Brazil, and regions in west Africa.

The volume is well conceived and tightly edited, creating a cohesiveness not always found in collected volumes. The foreword and introduction detail the purpose of the project, which, according to Francesca Bray, one of the four coeditors of the volume, is more than an exploration of the history of rice from multiple perspectives, but is also meant to challenge standard ways of looking at history by being more collaborative and multidisciplinary and to illustrate the application of new approaches to historical research. New questions as well as the possibility of new interpretations arise from such collaborations. Most scholars of food would not need to be convinced of this need for multidisciplinaryity; however, Bray is speaking to and for historians, who, she claims, need such a push. Her point that rice should be studied not only as a commodity but also as (in my words) a cultural artifact, symbol, nourishment, and aesthetic domain is an important one. This volume illustrates the worth of such expansion.

The book is organized around three sections with an introduction to each that describes and summarizes the primary debates and issues among historians. These introductions make the book particularly useful to scholars from other disciplines as well as to laypeople and students.

Part I, "Purity and Promiscuity," defines agriculture as humanity's attempt to control plants, a perspective reflecting the dualistic Western ethos of nature as an adversary to civilization. That ethos laid the foundation for industrialization, capitalism, modernity, and the treatment of food as primarily a commodity, a point addressed but not fully critiqued in the following chapters. The introduction nicely contextualizes the historical connections of rice to local societies as a narrative of humans attempting to control the "promiscuity" of rice to guarantee a semblance of mastery over its economic value as well as its nutritional worth. That narrative is then studied from a variety of approaches.

Chapter 2 critiques Clifford Geertz's influential theory of agricultural involution in Java, which posited that rice cultivation there resulted in a society of shared poverty and social elasticity, illustrating growth without development. Peter Boomgaard and Pieter Kroonenber suggest that, among other failures, Geertz overlooked the role of

colonial powers in maintaining peace and improving transportation routes that then helped alleviate food shortages. David Biggs (chapter 5) takes a material-semiotic approach, applying actor-network theory to understanding the relationships between the four types of rice existing simultaneously in the Mekong Delta. Sui-Wai Cheung (chapter 3) and Seung-Joon Lee (chapter 4) both point out the role of taste in the economic history of rice in Asia. Consumers, a group they feel has been ignored, drove the markets for rice, sometimes refusing cheaper varieties in favor of more expensive, imported ones. Lee makes the point that “a better understanding of the entire agricultural system should encompass the complete process of grain circulation from producers to consumers” (p. 101), a more holistic view that ties many seemingly disparate disciplines together. Bruce Mouse, Edwin Nuijten, Florent Okry, and Paul Richards (chapter 6) demonstrate the link between the commodification of rice production and slavery, illustrating also that outside interventions in Sierra Leone oftentimes failed.

Part II, “Environmental Matters,” uses the environment as a “prism” for examining both the effects of the environment on social history and how cultures have shaped the environment to their specific needs. In the introduction, Edda Fields Black points out that environmental history has been dominated by the theme of encounter by colonials, governments, aid workers, and other external agents. The approach here, though, is to present these issues from the viewpoint of the people who actually worked the land. Because these actors generally did not leave paper trails, historians must draw upon various alternative sources. Genetic analysis of rice types, archeology, botany, GIS mapping, historical linguistics, and ethnographies are used to identify and interpret the connections between rice production and the environment. These methods are used to explore the broader question, articulated by Hayden Smith in chapter 8 on South Carolina rice plantations, of how geography shapes culture and society. Erik Gilbert (chapter 9) then examines the movement of rice from Asia to Africa, partially confirming the “Black Rice” theory that rice and the knowledge of its cultivation were brought to the Americas with enslaved Africans. Gilbert argues that the transfer was neither simple nor direct and involved “multiple agents and innovators” (p. 226).

Examining the factors affecting production is essential to understanding the role of rice in the health of the societies producing and consuming it. Olga Linares (chapter 10) compares three villages in Senegal, concluding that the factors affecting production are deeper and more complex than just the weather. Similarly, Lauren Minsky (chapter 11) examines the causes of hunger and disease among rice producers in the Punjab and South Bengal.

The final section, Part III, “Power and Control,” points out that rice production requires an unusually large amount of control—over the rice itself, the land, water, and labor. This has then shaped the ways in which governments and societies have been organized. Walter Hawthorne (chapter 12) reintroduces the Black Rice debate, but reframes it as a loss of meaning attached to rice work by slaves. He points out that rice skills in the New World were not tied to cultural identity and conceptions of self as they had been. No longer a source of pride and personal agency, the work was only for survival, as was all slave work. In chapter 13, Peter Coclanis vehemently challenges the debate, offering detailed analyses in support of his argument that although the origins of rice in the United States may have been indebted to African slaves, modern U.S. rice cultivation is based in midwestern and “white” values and innovations. Penelope Francks (chapter 13) shifts the discussion to Japan, where she demonstrates that the maintenance of small-scale rice production has allowed for more equitable benefits for farmers than those offered by the large-scale corporate farms that are standard in the West.

To summarize, food cries out for an interdisciplinary approach, a fact that serves as the foundation for food studies. In that sense, this volume is not new or revolutionary. However, by grounding this study in the field of history, this book demonstrates not only the usefulness of drawing from multiple approaches, but also interrogates the discipline itself. This volume offers a wealth of information about rice along with much food for thought about how and why to study food.

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Sherene Seikaly. *Men of Capital: Scarcity and Economy in Mandate Palestine*. Palo Alto, CA: Stanford University Press, 2016. xii + 258 pp. ISBN-13 978-0-8047-9288-2, \$85.00 (cloth); 978-0-8047-9661-3, \$24.95 (paper).

Sherene Seikaly has written an important and highly original book on the economic and business history of Palestine that readers of this journal ought to take notice of. Given that readers here might not be familiar with the historiography of Palestine, and that the book has