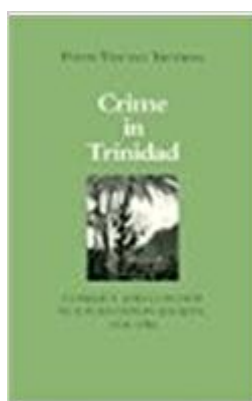


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Crime In Trinidad: Conflict And Control In A Plantation Society, 1838-1900



Book Information

Hardcover: 345 pages

Publisher: University of Tennessee Press; 1 edition (December 1, 1986)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 0870494910

ISBN-13: 978-0870494918

Product Dimensions: 5.8 x 1.1 x 8.8 inches

Shipping Weight: 1.3 pounds (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 5.0 out of 5 starsÂ Â See all reviewsÂ (1 customer review)

Best Sellers Rank: #3,577,310 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #67 inÂ Books > History >

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trotman's book is an excellent argument about the inner tensions and conflicts of trinidad's plantation economy. it is these antagonisms - between class, ethnic, and even gender groups - which "facilitated the development of activity that was labeled criminal." trotman does not, however, argue that the nature of plantation society is the sole source of crime, rather it is the source of a particular kind of criminal record. this of course is true of all societies with legal codes. he also does not seek to justify criminal activity; he makes it relative. in short, the argument is that from emancipation in 1833 onward, crime in trinidad evolved with the changing socio-economic structure of the plantation society. the plantocracy had to devise new ways of keeping plantations operating, and sought new ways to tie labor (former slaves who were now free) to the land. through lobbying and legislative acts, the plantocracy got what they wanted in a set of draconian laws that seemed to criminalize all sorts of activity other than manual work on the plantations. this meant vagrancy, incorrigible rogueness, etc. what makes trotman's argument more compelling is the pattern of sentencing officials gave out. for instance, instead of serving time behind bars in valuable labor seasons, offenders would have to pay steep fines or, in some cases, extend their labor contracts. other times, during the off seasons, planters would prefer the offenders stay in jail to ease their own financial burdens - you don't have to pay wages if the worker is locked up. the pattern of sentencing shows trotman that the legal system was completely in the planters' pockets, and as a result, reveals a new way of understanding criminal activity in post-emancipation trinidad.

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