

The Work of Richard Dunn

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Richard Dunn's published work thus far spans 42 years—from 1954 when he published a graduate student seminar paper in the *William and Mary Quarterly* on “The Trustees of Georgia and the House of Commons, 1732-1752,” to 1996 when his introduction to the *Journal* of John Winthrop appeared. His impressive *oeuvre* consists of two major scholarly books, an important textbook, four edited volumes of William Penn's papers, the edited journal of one of the key figures in colonial history, another major book comparing slavery in Jamaica and Virginia nearing completion, twelve chapters in books, articles numbering a baker's dozen, and book reviews as numerous as his age. I tote these up only for the record because Richard Dunn would never want to be measured by the number of pages in print but rather by the quality of the pages.

Dunn's scholarly contributions can be appreciated by discussing them in three interlocking categories: imperial politics, religion in its political and social contexts, and labor systems. The first phase of his career was rooted in imperial politics. This, no doubt, owes much to the tutelage of Wesley Frank Craven, who schooled his students in Charles McLean Andrews' work. Thus, Dunn's early articles on the Georgia Trustees and the House of Commons; the demise of the Bermuda Company; the founding of South Carolina; “Imperial Pressures on Massachusetts and Jamaica” in the late seventeenth century; and a good portion of *Puritans and Yankees: The Winthrop Dynasty of New England*, reflect the scholarly climate of political history in the 1950s.¹ Also, the first phase of his scholarship bridges the Atlantic, logical enough since Dunn arrived at Princeton intending to study English history, his interest sparked by his English mother and cultivated by his Tudor-Stuart studies in history and literature at Harvard.

Once he spun an Anglo-American thread, Dunn wove it into almost all his subsequent work. In annotating and introducing four volumes of William Penn's papers in the 1980s in collaboration with Mary Maples Dunn, he necessarily delved deeply into Penn the colonial American founder and Penn the Englishman with tangled connections with the British government.² All of this work is meticulous, firmly grounded in archival research on both sides of the Atlantic, and partaking of the prosopographic methodology much in evidence after World War II.

In his chapter on the Glorious Revolution for the forthcoming *Oxford History of the British Empire*, Dunn has revisited the first phase of his scholarly career. He intended to write a book on this subject 35 years ago but got

sidetracked on a vastly different topic—one that reconfigured his career and launched him on what may be the most fertile and important phase of his scholarship, the study of English slavery in the British West Indies and North America. But before appraising this phase, it is fitting to turn to religion, another area in which Dunn will be read and discussed for many years.³

Puritans and Yankees (1962), Dunn's first book, is assuredly about religion but is notable primarily for the interweaving of economic, political, and religious history in New England's first century.⁴ Written at a time when Perry Miller held sway, it was much influenced by Miller's *From Colony to Province* but restricted by it as well.⁵

Rereading *Puritans and Yankees*, one is particularly struck with Dunn's stylistic finesse. The preface begins with these words:

In the tiny village of Groton, Suffolk, the curious visitor can find an ancient gray stone church, standing among tall grass and tombstones against the open gently rolling fields. Groton Church is a characteristic East Anglican medieval parish church. Her stout pebble tower and walls have been gently weathered by 500 years of wind, rain, and occasional sun. Her interior blends perfect form with honest country workmanship. The stone arcades, plaster walls and hammer-beam roof are chaste enough to suit a Puritan. Only the ugly Victorian stained glass East window obtrudes—a gift from America in 1875.⁶

Here we find the crispness and subtle humor that can be found in all of Dunn's work. Here we find unembarrassed directness about what is grim, ugly, shameful, ironic, or paradoxical.

A few lines that appear early in Chapter 1 on John Winthrop, the founder, signal Dunn's formidable descriptive powers, his nuanced language, and his straight-ahead ability to reach historical judgments:

John Winthrop is very easy to caricature, yet not so easy to describe. Portraits show an austere formidable man, with heavy jaw, wide forehead, long nose, and a masklike face stamped with bleak sobriety. Yet the full mouth and deep, brooding gaze express his strong passion and sensuality. Winthrop's manifold writings exhibit the same paradoxical range of qualities. He left a good many formal tracts on religious and political subjects, the work of a lawyer and amateur theologian, stilted, intricate, and crabbed. His private journals are packed with keen, disciplined observation, precise details, and staggering prejudices. In letters to his wife or dear friends, the man could speak in cadences of naked joy and rhapsody.

He displayed admirable self-mastery, and a less attractive mastery over other people. But the central point is plain enough: John Winthrop was the first American whose keen awareness of human inadequacy drove him to demand responsible action from himself and from all his fellow men. He was the first keeper of the New England conscience.⁷

It is noteworthy that *Puritans and Yankees* has few earmarks, if any, of the consensus historiography that was a powerful part of historical revisionism in the postwar period, which did not sweep the field as thoroughly as some have imagined. *Puritans and Yankees* is a poignant evocation of how militant Puritanism became domesticated, of how Puritans became Yankees. This was not an unfamiliar theme—treated memorably in Perry Miller's *From Colony to Province* and in Edmund S. Morgan's *The Puritan Family*.⁸ Miller himself, in a *New York Times* book review, wrote magisterially with words that must have left the young assistant professor at Penn smiling for a week. Dunn's dramatization of the Puritan transformation, wrote Miller, "in terms of a specific family, all members of who lived in the very center of it, has an immediacy and a charm which the more formal histories can hardly emulate." Further, Miller wrote, *Puritans and Yankees* is "a highly readable narrative, . . . a fresh and lively and clear-sighted exploration of a social evolution that would prove of paramount importance to a civilization of which none of the protagonists could possibly have dreamed."⁹

Dunn's handsomely constructed first book on Puritanism stood at the end of the fully ripened political-intellectual paradigm and at the beginning of the social history tectonic plate shift just beginning when *Puritan and Yankees* appeared in 1962. Dunn regards his first book as "a coda" to Miller's epic *From Colony to Province*. He probably had misgivings about the ground his book might have occupied when Darrett Rutman's *Winthrop's Boston* appeared three years later, the first of the New England community studies influenced by the Annales school methodologies.¹⁰

If consensus historiography never snared Dunn in the first phase of his career, it certainly did not when he went to London in 1962 to work at the Public Record Office for a book on the Glorious Revolution. Encountering a body of material on the early English colonies in the tropical West Indies, Dunn shelved his Glorious Revolution project in favor of a journey to *terra incognita*. Studying how the English tobacco and sugar planters in the seventeenth century made a fateful transition from the use of indentured to slave labor, Dunn threw in his lot with one of the most dynamic and important sub-fields of history to emerge in the last half-century. His entry into slave studies has occupied him for thirty years and has required a recalibration of his intellectual compass and a retooling of his methodological approach to

history. It is here that his contributions to the rewriting of English and American history may be the most lasting.

If turning to slave studies changed his scholarly career, Dunn did not abandon earlier interests and intellectual frameworks. He returned to John Winthrop, spending thousands of hours on a new edition of John Winthrop's journal, published 34 years after his *Puritans and Yankees* appeared.¹¹ He returned to his interest in the Glorious Revolution three decades after beginning *Sugar and Slaves*.¹² And he spent a decade as co-editor of *The Papers of William Penn*, where he displayed his undiminished interest in religion, provincial politics, and imperial relations. But that momentous decision in 1962, while sipping his pints at the Queen's Parlor near the Public Record Office, turned Richard Dunn into a social historian. Dunn announced this conversion in the preface to *Sugar and Slaves*, calling the book a "social history" and speaking of the social historian's search for documentary evidence.¹³ His later work on Winthrop and Penn, moreover, has telltale signs of his conversion to social history.

Sugar and Slaves is not a book about British Caribbean society from the bottom up, as we might expect of a social historian. Rather it is about "the rapid rise of a cohesive and potent master class", on the formation and social origins of seventeenth-century tobacco and sugar planters which "took shape initially and most decisively in Barbados."¹⁴ This, then, is a book from the top down. Nonetheless, it is social history, a brilliant exposition of British West Indian society that necessarily had to begin with a composite portrait of the outlaw planters and the world they made. Looking back a quarter century after this book was published in 1972 and following Dunn's journey since, we can see that *Sugar and Slaves* occupies a midway point between *Puritans and Yankees* and his forthcoming book on eighteenth and early nineteenth-century slave life in Jamaica and Virginia.

Before examining the signal contributions of *Sugar and Slaves*, it is worth tarrying on points of methodology and style. American historians captivated by the illuminating power of family reconstitution, demographic analysis, and social structure studies, as pioneered by the French and English historians of the post-World War II period, had to ferret out new sources and analyze them with techniques not taught then in graduate school.¹⁵ Dunn quickly devoured the pioneering studies of English and New England towns and searched out, in London and the West Indies, the unexamined sources from which a composite portrait of Caribbean colonial life could be created: passenger lists, inventories of estates, tax lists, war compensation claims, early censuses, militia lists, parish records, land warrants, customs ledgers, and plantation records. All of us schooled in analyzing literary sources, mostly penned by the uppermost members of society, found this work frustrating, fragmentary, eye-straining, and often inconclusive—but also intriguing and exhilarating. We felt like moths drawn to the flame, seeking illumination but risking incineration.

In researching *Sugar and Slaves*, Dunn had a more formidable task than the New England social historians whose books were emerging in the early 1970s. Lockridge's study of tiny Dedham,¹⁶ for example, is based almost entirely on four conveniently published volumes of town and church records. By contrast, Dunn's study of the rise of the sugar planters on six British West Indies islands is painstakingly constructed from far-flung and terrifyingly incomplete records. The book, in sum, is a methodological triumph.

Beyond its important findings, *Sugar and Slaves* will be read and appreciated for many years because of Dunn's literary polish, a quality that is especially important for constructing a convincing portrait when only some of the pieces of the canvas are available. Literary finesse also marks a subtle change in Dunn's understanding of the motive forces shaping history. For example, at the beginning of the book he writes:

The Englishmen who settled in the islands were not mythmakers in the heroic vein of Capt. John Smith, John Winthrop, or William Penn. They did not attempt calypso-style Holy Experiments, nor did they build palm-fringed Cities on a Hill. The most famous seventeenth-century Englishman in the Caribbean was Sir Henry Morgan, the buccaneer, which is rather like having Al Capone as the most famous American of the twentieth century.¹⁷

Explaining how the English adapted painfully to the strange New World, Dunn writes:

Seventeenth-century Englishmen attuned their lives to the weather, to seasonal change, and to the annual cycle of birth, growth, maturity, and death. But in the West Indies, they found a year-round growing season, year-round summer, and year-round heat. They were used to a moderate climate: moderately warm, moderately cold, moderately rainy, moderately sunny. But in the tropics they had to adjust their eyes to brilliant sunlight, and a palette of splashing colors: vegetation startlingly green, fruits and flowers in flaming reds and yellows, the mountains in shimmering blues and greens, shading to deep purple, the moon and stars radiant and sparkling at night, and the encircling sea a spectrum of jeweled colors from cobalt to silver. They found the Caribbean atmosphere to be volatile: glazing heat suddenly relieved by refreshing showers, and soft caressing breezes capriciously dissolving into wild and terrifying storms. In climate, as in European power politics, the Indies lay 'beyond the line.'¹⁸

At the end of *Sugar and Slaves* Dunn's literary skill and comparative range conclude the book memorably:

Despite . . . close contacts, the islanders rapidly diverged from the mainlanders, most particularly from the Puritan colonists in New England. . . . Most of the New Englanders, through their numerous elective offices and frequent town meetings, encouraged (indeed almost required) every inhabitant to participate in public life, but in the Indies the big sugar planters completely dominated politics. . . . In New England the young were deferential to their elders, repressed their adolescent rebelliousness, and often waited into their thirties to marry and set up on their own, while in the islands there were no elders, the young were in control, and many a planter made his fortune and died by age thirty. In short, the Caribbean and New England planters were polar opposites; they represented the outer limits of English social expression in the seventeenth century.¹⁹

In turning to the social history of the early English Caribbean, Dunn's eye for the paradoxical, the bittersweet, and the downright tragic becomes apparent. At the beginning of *Sugar and Slaves*, Dunn explains how the pioneering English planters "made their beautiful islands almost uninhabitable." Midway through his story, he expresses his dismay that "From New England to Virginia to Jamaica, the English planters in seventeenth-century America developed the habit of murdering the soil for a few quick crops and then moving along. On the sugar plantations, unhappily, they almost murdered the slaves." Most tragic is his exacting account of how Englishmen "turned their small islands into amazingly effective sugar-production machines, manned by armies of black slaves" and how this altered English behavior, values, and ideas.²⁰ In Dunn's hands, this is a depressing story of human degradation, of the brutalization of Africans, and of the self-brutalization of the English planters and overseers. The English sugar islands, Dunn tells us, were "disastrous social failures" by the early eighteenth century, and he bravely tries to withhold his scorn for the sugar planters without much success.²¹

It is revealing to compare *Sugar and Slaves* with Edmund Morgan's *American Slavery, American Freedom: The Ordeal of Colonial Virginia*.²² Both of these Puritan historians, each turning from literary sources to the records from which social history is now constructed and each turning from free to slave labor societies, delineated themes, interpreted human behavior, and reached conclusions that made them read like closet Marxists. Sugar and tobacco production, they both explained, developed hand-in-hand with coerced and degraded labor. Grasping for wealth, profit-maximizing English planters

relentlessly sought overseas markets, ruthlessly exploited fellow humans, accumulated narrowly concentrated power, and resónated very little to liberal ideas and higher values. Both books, dealing with class formation and class analysis, have a tone of moral outrage at the behavior of the storied freedom-loving English adventurers in the New World. Dunn gloomily ends *Sugar and Slaves*: "The stark dichotomy between the all-powerful sugar magnate and his abject army of black bondsmen was the ultimate expression in seventeenth-century English society of man's strenuous search for wealth in an era of primitive productive techniques."²³

What of the power of ideas? In a chapter on "Life in the Tropics," Dunn struggles to show how inherited ideas and values continued to matter in the British Caribbean in limited ways. "In their basic living arrangements—food, clothing, and shelter—the early settlers," he explains, hung on to English customs.²⁴ But here Dunn sees only cultural stubbornness or stupidity in clinging to English habits that ill-suited the tropics. They foolishly wore cool weather garb, ate the wrong food, and built houses absurdly. In all other matters, the English planters tragically abandoned what might have rescued them from their descent into behavioral hell: they turned their backs on the idea of representative legislatures in order to convert the assemblies into platforms for the master class, sabotaged the militia system because it interfered with sugar production, muzzled religion in order to prevent slave unrest, made common law a mockery by withholding due process from three-fourths of the population, and scoffed at education.

Twenty-five years after its publication, *Sugar and Slaves* is as full-bodied and reliable as good English ale. Only a few particulars bear revision in light of new research (such as new calculations of English immigration to different parts of the hemisphere). If there was a major flaw, it was one that Dunn was already in the process of correcting. In the preface, he wrote "To see how the blacks themselves reacted to their treatment by the island planters is scarcely possible, given the nature of the surviving evidence, yet there is a good deal of revealing information about slave conditions and slave revolts in the English Caribbean. . . ."²⁵ To the extent that he covers slave life, Dunn was sure-footed. For example, his comparative analysis of slave revolts in Barbados and Jamaica is very perceptive, focusing on the far greater chance of succeeding on the north coast of Jamaica than in Barbados, Virginia, Maryland, or other English colonies where geographical conditions discouraged African rebels. This judgment, contrary to that of Orlando Patterson, whose book on Jamaica slavery appeared as Dunn was finishing his study, has stood up to the present. Dunn also briefly treated African cultural retentions in the West Indies—language, religion, family structure, and names. This was as far as he could go, given the paucity of evidence on slave life in the records he examined.

Yet Dunn anticipated the project he doubted could be done—a study of the inner lives of slaves—in a memorable chapter on “Death in the Tropics.” Here he exhibited his skills as a demographic historian, later to be sharpened, by isolating two key factors in the demographic disaster of island versus mainland slaves: first, the especially lethal disease environment in the tropics; second, the extraordinarily brutal slaveowners who directed a uniquely brutal crop regimen. Philip D. Curtin’s *Atlantic Slave Trade*,²⁶ published three years before *Sugar and Slaves*, had noted the huge contrast between the demographic success of British mainland slaves and the demographic disaster of slaves nearly everywhere in the tropics, whether the masters were English, French, Spanish, Portuguese, or Dutch. But Curtin had not explored the causes, mentioning only the possible factor of tropical disease. Dunn, along with Michael Craton and James Walvin,²⁷ nailed down the reasons for the disaster. By the early 1970s, Dunn was on his way to a comparative study of African enslavement in mainland and island British America.

Dunn’s analysis of the brutal sugar system in the West Indies swam against the tide of emerging scholarship: what might be called the “heroic enslaved African.” *Sugar and Slaves* was published before Eugene Genovese’s *Roll, Jordan, Roll*, John Blassingame’s *The Slave Community*, and Herbert Gutman’s *The Black Family in Slavery and Freedom*.²⁸ Hence Dunn was not in a position to address arguments about the resilience of enslaved Africans, their inventiveness in creating new cultural forms, and their near-heroic maintenance of family structure. But his analysis of African life in the British Caribbean could have given little comfort to a new genre of African Americanists.

In *Sugar and Slaves*, Dunn argues that in the main enslaved Africans lived unspeakable lives, died prematurely, struggled futilely to resist brutalization, and in the end had to await deliverance at the hands of their oppressors. Ironically, Dunn writes, “the English planters, who treated their slaves with such contemptuous inhumanity, were rescued time and again from disaster by the compassionate generosity of the Negroes.”²⁹ In Dunn’s historical reconstruction, African insurrectionists, even in Britain’s most rebellious colony, never had much effect in ending slavery. Much more important in destabilizing the British death-dealing sugar economy were hurricanes, earthquakes, malarial epidemics, and French marauders.

In 1977, building upon a signal achievement in *Sugar and Slaves*, Dunn launched a comparative study of slave life in Jamaica and Virginia at the floodtide of plantation slavery.³⁰ He has labored on this project for more than two decades. This study is based on two sets of extraordinary annual plantation censuses or inventory books, along with plantation correspondence, minute books and accounts; local and provincial tax records; and other ancillary materials covering more than a century, ending in the mid-1830s in Jamaica and the mid-1860s in the American South. The annual plantation censuses,

both in Virginia and Jamaica, are a social historian's dream. Specifying names of each slave, with age, sex, health, and work assignment, they provide information on family structure, laboring lives, and medical histories—data that generally are not available for any part of the white population.

The adroit use of these materials has allowed Dunn to reconstruct the lives of more than 2,000 enslaved individuals. In eight essays since 1977, some of them not yet published, his analysis has become more and more refined, and his meticulous piecing together of individual work and reproductive lives of the hemisphere's most invisible people has led to important insights, clever hunches, and some towering and provocative conclusions.

While becoming one of the most ingenious methodologists through his use of plantation records to establish demographic trends, family structure, and labor patterns, Dunn's work cut against the grain of his colleagues' studies, which pointed to the "dynamic economic, cultural, and social slave achievements."³¹ The historian who seldom trucked with the consensus history of the 1960s trafficked little with the idea of a "slave community" that captured headlines in the 1970s and 1980s. He has not strayed from his conclusion that slave systems, whatever the religion and nationality of the masters, whatever the region or crop regimen, afforded little opportunity for coerced Africans to achieve very much or to rebel very effectively.

While never fully subscribing to Stanley Elkins' Sambo thesis,³² where the cultural switchboards of a supposedly traumatized and infantilized slave population were all but ripped out, Dunn has mostly stressed white brutality and the stifling of black ambition by cruel white planters, managers, and drivers. African-American achievement and slave resistance figure little in his work, and the alleged semi-autonomous African-American culture is barely discernible. In the first chapter of the forthcoming book on Jamaican and Virginia slavery, he describes the "essence of slave life on a sugar estate in Jamaica" as "a dehumanizing life of exhausting labor, debilitating disease, and demeaning social relationships."³³ Reflecting further on Jamaican slavery, Dunn concludes that the Mesopotamia slaves on the eve of emancipation in the early 1830s "accepted their lot: a regimen of brutal labor, broken health, and early death."³⁴ Similarly, the Tayloe slaves in Virginia and Alabama, released from slavery by the Civil War, "were poorly positioned to break loose from their still servile status" and hence lived lives as freemen only in name, consigned to a reality of "entrapment, thwarted ambition, and arrested independence."³⁵ This decidedly unheroic narrative can be partly explained by Dunn's focus on two sets of plantation records that may not portray typical slave lives. Dunn's unheroic slave may also be explained by his reluctance to go beyond the plantation records to ask broader questions of the sort Sidney Mintz and Richard Price have posed about the cultural resilience and ingenuity of enslaved Africans.

From the beginning of his study of Mesopotamia and Mount Airy, Dunn recognized that the plantation records, though very rich, could not yield “precise statistical formulation.” He rightly chastises the cliometricians’ “abstract mode of computation [that] tends to rob men and women of individual personality, strips communities of local variety, and turns both people and places into digits in a data bank.”³⁶ From the outset, Dunn has tried to resurrect human faces, weary bodies, and emotional lives that lay behind the stony scratchmarks recorded year after year in the plantation records.³⁷

Dunn’s big story, based on aggregative analysis but enlivened by life histories of individual slaves, tells of labor regimens far more severe in Jamaica than in Virginia. By 1977, he had demonstrated how the Jamaican sugar field work routines depressed female fertility far below that of all modern populations. Dunn anticipated this in *Sugar and Slaves*, and by 1977 he had brought data from a century’s worth of plantation records to bear on this issue. Since then, he has continued his investigation of the precise factors that dealt out death and impeded fertility so differently in two English plantation societies. He leaves no doubt that both were harsh, but he shows that brutality wore strikingly different faces.

What has especially preoccupied Dunn and led to his most important contributions to slave studies is his focus on the nutritional deficiencies of enslaved Africans in the tropics and the work routines in the cane fields of Jamaica. By 1987, he made the astounding claim that he had reconstructed “the individual life history of every single African American who lived and worked on this plantation [Mesopotamia] during the final seventy years of Caribbean slavery” and that by tracing year by year the “work experiences of these people individually and collectively,” he could demonstrate how brutal work routines blighted the reproductive lives of slave women.³⁸ In later essays, Dunn has produced striking evidence, meshing with that of evidence from another Jamaican sugar plantation, that African women composed a majority of the British Caribbean sugar workers. Painstakingly reconstructing individual careers of Mesopotamia slaves between 1762 and 1831, he shows that only one in six slave women escaped the punishing canefield labor—a brutal regimen that “injured their health, impaired their fertility, and shortened their life expectancy.”³⁹ This stunning conclusion that men more frequently escaped the holing, planting, and harvesting gangs than women alters longstanding beliefs about the slave economy.

Dunn’s parallel analysis of Virginia slave women provides a nearly watertight argument. His data show a nearly normative fertility rate among enslaved women at Mount Airy, who were spared the nutritional inadequacies and withering labor routines that cut through Jamaica’s women like the grim reaper. Whereas nearly half of Mesopotamia’s African women bore no children who survived more than a few months and about half of all pregnancies

terminated in miscarriages, stillbirths, or rapid infant death, the reproductive lives of Mount Airy's women was far better.

In life stories, Dunn provides case studies that poignantly explain how differently slavery operated in two of England's most important colonies. The medical and labor histories of Sarah Affir, a Jamaican woman, and Winney Grimshaw, a Virginia slave, dramatize how the relationship of deaths to births in Jamaica, roughly two to one, were reversed in Virginia, and correlatively how the American mainland, receiving only 4-5 percent of all African slaves, came to contain something like 40 percent of the hemispheric black population by the mid-nineteenth century.

Dunn's exacting reconstruction of hundreds of life histories yields other findings that tumble from his essays like stones crushing previously held historical understandings. At Mesopotamia, the trauma of sugar field labor brought death to African Americans in their early forties on average. Females were tougher than men in surviving the same gang tasks of holing, planting, and harvesting sugar cane. Contrary to the plans of sugar planters, the field labor force changed from about nearly two-thirds male in the late eighteenth century to a majority of females by the 1830s. Mulatto slaves, though given privileged jobs outside the cane fields, died earlier on average than black field workers. Some mysteries still remain. Especially puzzling is the high infant mortality rate among enslaved women in Virginia where easier prenatal work routines, better nutrition, and a more salubrious climate should have reduced this rate much below that of enslaved Jamaican newborns. Nonetheless, Dunn's work has reshaped our understanding of colonial slavery.

While turning to social history in his study of slavery, Dunn has not abandoned the role of ideas. Nor, as a colonial historian, could he eschew the adaptation of English culture in British America. In fact, one of the marks of his work has been a shrewd evaluation of how cultural patterns and religious ideology altered the practices of slaveowners and shaped the existential lives of slaves. This is especially notable in his examination of how the benevolent inclinations of the Barhams of Jamaica and the Tayloes of Virginia and Alabama affected the lives of their slaves.⁴⁰

Dunn explains that both the Barhams and Tayloes were warm-hearted masters who genuinely cared about their slaves' well-being. In one cogent essay, he shows that the founding Barham sugar planter was a fervent Moravian who subsidized and dispatched Moravian missionaries to his Jamaican plantation in 1754 to minister to the spiritual welfare of his slaves. Certainly this was an unusually religious sugar planter. The second-generation Barhams were absentee planters, Dunn reports, but they honored their father's religious conscience by continuing the Moravian mission at Mesopotamia, trying to ease the workload at Mesopotamia, and providing special care for pregnant women. Morally offended by the slave trade that was under attack by British abolitionists, they halted the importation of newly enslaved Africans after 1793.⁴¹

From this point on, still facing the need to replenish the ranks of their dying sugar workers, the Barhams purchased new workers from other Jamaican planters. Ironically, this play of religious and moral temperament further increased the death rate at Mesopotamia, driving it above that of neighboring plantations and forcing slave drivers to extract from an overaged and disease-ravaged sugar workers the same labor that more able-bodied new African arrivals might have performed. By the early nineteenth century, knowing their slaves only through their managers' reports, the absentee Barhams concluded that their benevolence was ill-rewarded with slovenly work and moral disorder among what should have been grateful slaves.

In a staggering irony, the biggest payoff of benevolence, according to Dunn's study of the Moravian mission at Mesopotamia, was mainly for the financiers rather than the supposed recipients of benevolence. In the fiery six-week Jamaican slave rebellion in 1831-32, key Mesopotamia slaves, imbibing the Moravian doctrine of submissiveness, refused to participate, fended off black rebels who arrived on the Barhams' estate with incendiary intent, and worked the sugar crop when the rest of the island was in flames. Ideas certainly fired the minds of Moravians who went to the ends of the earth for the love of their Saviour. But religious commitment at Mesopotamia neutralized the religious commitment of abolitionists and the freedom ideology of slave rebels. Though rebellious slaves at neighboring plantations were inspired by Baptist religious instruction, the slaves tutored by Moravians at the Barham estates never produced a Nat Turner.⁴²

Turning to Virginia, Dunn shows that benevolence was dispensed at bargain rates. The Tayloes were as humanely inclined in Virginia as were the Barhams in Jamaica. For example, William Henry Tayloe, the last of the slaveowning Tayloes, was "a warm-hearted, benevolent, and compassionate man who took deep personal interest in his black people and felt great responsibility for their proper care."⁴³

Yet even in the post-Revolutionary period, when thousands of Southerners were manumitting slaves or permitting them to purchase their freedom, the Tayloes made only a single grant of freedom among some 700 slaves. Enriched by the healthy reproduction of their slaves, they unhesitatingly sold off surplus laborers, particularly women and children. "Routinely separating boys and girls from their parents when they reached their early teens," writes Dunn, the Tayloes shuffled slaves to various farms in Virginia and later dispatched prime workers to new estates in Alabama—a forced migration that separated husbands from wives and children from parents.⁴⁴ At the primary plantation at Mount Airy, the Tayloes imported men and sold women, engineering the labor force to maximize crop production with the precision of agribusiness. The cost to black family life was immense. Unlike the absentee Barhams, the Tayloes were always on the job, making key managerial decisions rarely affected by moral

considerations. Tayloe-style benevolence, in Dunn's analysis, provided a veneer of planter respectability but mattered little for what counted to slaves—personal liberty or, at least, the protection of family under slavery. If the Barhams had come to Virginia and the Tayloes to Jamaica, would sugar slave regimens and tobacco-cotton slave regimens have differed in any significant way at Mesopotamia and Mount Airy?

Historians eagerly await the big book built on the Barham and Tayloe papers—a study that will conclude with what promises to be an illuminating and provocative comparison of emancipation experience among the liberated Barham and Tayloe slaves. Surely this book will add another brilliant feather to the cap of one of the finest historians of this generation.

Richard Dunn's work will be read for many years because, like all lasting historical scholarship, it is an amalgam of deep archival research, methodological innovations, new perspectives, and literary grace. His meticulous editing of the *Papers of William Penn* and the *Journal of John Winthrop* has provided magnificent documentary records—on the two most important North American colonial founders of the seventeenth century—enlivened by the kind of perspicacious annotation that could come from only a scholar deeply immersed in both early modern English history and colonial American history. His many studies of religion, social relations, labor systems, and politics will endure because of their balance of detail and wide coverage. Dunn has always framed his empirical studies broadly, employing the microscope and telescope together so that the particular historical figure, the specific place, and the discrete problem under study are connected to questions of order and freedom, justice and tolerance, family and society, the individual and the community. This universal point of view is what demarcates modern historical scholarship from antiquarianism.

Subtly threaded through Dunn's work is a quality that must be called moral. It appears in rueful comments, in wordplay signaling a raised eyebrow, in suggestive juxtapositions of material, and occasionally in passages expressing righteous outrage. I sensed this more than forty years ago as an undergraduate sitting in Dunn's weekly precepts on Colonial American history. An infectious laugh and a winning smile could not disguise the presence of a very serious teacher for whom history was much more than entertaining tales about the past, more even than an objective, neutral assessment. Though a thoroughly professional historian, both as a teacher and a scholar, Dunn is impatient with man's inhumanity to man, with unconscionable behavior, and quite pointedly with the massive contradictions of freedom-loving Englishmen creating a living hell for Africans. The grandson and son of Presbyterian ministers, the nephew of Congregationalist and Episcopalian preachers, the descendent of Ulster immigrants to East New Jersey in the 1680s, Dunn admits to being "decidedly Puritan" and possessing "an unctuous liberal mindset." He has channeled the

family moral temperament into the academy rather than the church. There is hardly such a thing as a notable historian who is not a passionate historian. Dunn is both. He is a shining example of how the keen mind, fortified by a sense of right and wrong in the world, revisits the past and devises the work of predecessor historians in the name of tolerant humanism.

Notes

1. "The Trustees of Georgia and the House of Commons, 1732-1752," *William and Mary Quarterly*, 3d ser., 11 (1954) 551-65; "The Downfall of the Bermuda Company: A Restoration Farce," *ibid.*, 20 (1963), 487-512; "Imperial Pressures on Massachusetts and Jamaica, 1675-1700," in *Anglo-American Political Relations, 1625-1775*, Alison Gilbert Olson and Richard Maxwell Brown, eds. (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1970), 52-75; "The English Sugar Islands and the Founding of South Carolina," *South Carolina Historical Magazine*, 72 (1971), 81-93.
2. *The Papers of William Penn*, edited with Mary Maples Dunn, Richard Ryerson, Scott Wilds, Jean Soderlund, Marianne Wokeck, Craig Horle, Joy Wiltenburg, and Alison Hirsch (4 vols.; University of Pennsylvania Press, 1981-87).
3. Dunn's *The Age of the Religious Wars, 1559-1689* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1970), a textbook now in preparation for a third edition is not considered here.
4. *Puritans and Yankees: The Winthrop Dynasty in New England, 1630-1717* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1962).
5. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1953).
6. *Ibid.*, v.
7. *Ibid.*, 3-4.
8. (New York: Harper & Row, 1942).
9. "Unto the Third Generation," *New York Times Book Review*, June 3, 1962.
10. (New York: Norton, 1965).
11. *The Journal of John Winthrop, 1630-1649*, edited with Laetitia Yeandle (Cambridge: Harvard University Press and Massachusetts Historical Society, 1996). An earlier version of Dunn's introduction to the *Journal* is "John Winthrop Writes His Journal," *William and Mary Quarterly*, 3d ser., 61 (1984), 185-212.
12. Forthcoming in the *Oxford History of the British Empire*.
13. *Sugar and Slaves: The Rise of the Planter Class in the English West Indies, 1624-1712* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1972).
14. *Ibid.*, 46-48.
15. For Dunn's appraisal of the new social history of New England communities, see "The Social History of Early New England," *American Quarterly*, 24 (1972), 661-79.
16. *A New England Town: The First Hundred Years* (New York: Norton, 1970).
17. *Sugar and Slaves*, xv.
18. *Ibid.*, 40.
19. *Ibid.*, 323.
20. *Ibid.*, xv, 223, xiii, 340.
21. *Ibid.*, 340.
22. (New York: Norton, 1975).

23. *Ibid.*, 341.
24. *Ibid.*, 264.
25. *Ibid.*, xvi.
26. (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1969).
27. *A Jamaican Plantation: The History of Worthy Park, 1670-1970* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1970).
28. Genovese (New York: Pantheon Books, 1974); Blassingame (2d ed.; New York: Oxford University Press, 1979); Gutman (New York: Pantheon Books, 1976).
29. *Sugar and Slaves*, 262.
30. Dunn's interest in slave life became part of his explorations of colonial labor systems, as discussed in his two essays on "Masters, Servants and Slaves in the Colonial Chesapeake and the Caribbean," in David B. Quinn, ed. *Early Maryland in a Wider World* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1982), 242-66; "Black Society in the Chesapeake, 1776-1810," in Ira Berlin and Ronald Hoffman, eds., *Slavery and Freedom in the Age of the American Revolution* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1982), 45-82, and "Servants and Slaves: The Recruitment and Employment of Labor," in Jack P. Greene and J. R. Pole, eds., *Colonial British America* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1984), 157-94.
31. "A Tale of Two Plantations: Slave Life at Mesopotamia in Jamaica and Mount Airy in Virginia, 1799-1828," *William and Mary Quarterly*, 3d ser., 34 (1977), 85.
32. *Slavery* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1959).
33. "Sarah Affir vs. Winney Grimshaw: Caribbean vs. Old South Slavery," unpublished mss., 23.
34. *Ibid.*, 35; this theme threads through essay-length previews of the forthcoming book: "Sugar Production and Slave Women in Jamaica," in Ira Berlin and Philip D. Morgan, eds. *Cultivation and Culture: Labor and the Shaping of Slave Life in the Americas* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1993), 49-72; "The Story of Two Jamaican Slaves: Sarah Affir and Robert McAlpine of Mesopotamia Estate," in Roderick A. McDonald, ed. *Caribbean Accounts: Essays on the British West Indies and the Atlantic Economy* (Kingston: University of the West Indies Press, 1996); "'Dreadful Idlers' in the Cane Fields: The Slave Labor Pattern on a Jamaican Sugar Estate, 1762-1831," *Journal of Interdisciplinary History*, 17 (1987), 195-822.
35. "Sarah Affir vs. Winney Grimshaw," 35.
36. "A Tale of Two Plantations," 34.
37. Dunn's creative use of plantation records has intersected with pathbreaking studies of Jamaican slavery by Barry Higman, the first to use British slave registration records from the early nineteenth century to analyze labor patterns in the Caribbean sugar islands, and by James Walvin, who first used detailed plantation records to provide a picture of a West Indian sugar gang in action. See Higman, *Slave Population and Economy in Jamaica, 1807-1834* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976) and *Slave Populations of the British Caribbean, 1807-1834* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1984) and Walvin, *Searching for the Invisible Man: Slaves and Plantation Life in Jamaica* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1978).
38. "'Dreadful Idlers,'" 796.
39. "Sugar Production and Slave Women," 50.
40. *Moravian Missionaries at Work in a Jamaican Slave Community, 1754-1835* (Minneapolis: Associates of the James Ford Bell Library, 1994); "Sarah Affir vs. Winney Grimshaw"; "The Story of Two Jamaican Slaves".
41. *Moravian Missionaries at Work*.
42. *Ibid.*
43. "Sarah Affir vs. Winney Grimshaw," 39.
44. *Ibid.*