



## Dale Tomich (1946-2024) ...in His Own Words (Part II)<sup>1</sup> Interviews, February-June 2024 by Juan Giusti-Cordero

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Dale Tomich, who passed away in August 2024, had a singular trajectory as a Caribbean scholar. His best-known work, *Slavery in the Circuit of Sugar: Martinique and the World Economy (1830-1848)* (1990) stands rather apart in Caribbean historiography, even though his construct of the “second slavery” has been fertile for Atlantic history (Blackburn 2024; Dal Lago 2025). Tomich has been especially recognized beyond the United States, where his work was at the cutting edge of scholarship in political economy, Marxist theory, theoretical history, and historical methodology. Over the course of four decades, Tomich’s books and essays have been seminal for “contextualizing and theorizing the history of the modern world economy, particularly the role of New World slavery (the plantation) in the construction of modern capitalism.” (Crichlow and Ciusti 2024: 249). Dale’s close understanding of Caribbean and Brazilian history, which he merged into a study of Atlantic history, built bridges where few scholars have crossed. Always self-effacing, Dale did not often discuss his remarkable intellectual path; yet it is relevant to understanding the multiple layers of his work, its wider context, and its possibilities.

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<sup>1</sup> Part I appeared in *Journal of World-Systems Research* Summer/Autumn 2025,31(2); DOI 10.5195/JWSR.2025.1359



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The following interviews catch a glimpse of Dale as he looked back on his intellectual trajectory. After a period of remission, his health had begun to deteriorate in February 2024 and by June it had worsened considerably. At first, Dale had been a bit skeptical about talking much about this personal life—who would care about this, he would ask. Quite Dale. But then we got into the swing of the interviews and he was eager to go back in time. Dale was ready to talk about his own making.

Dale obtained his BA (1968) and PhD (1975) in Madison. While a History undergraduate, Dale worked under Robert Starobin. Starobin broke new ground in the historiography of enslavement and was a vehement academic voice of the emerging Black Power movement. In 1968, Dale wrote together with Starobin and by himself for *Radical America*, the leading magazine of the New Left at the time.

Dale's interest in the Caribbean was largely self-driven and self-taught, as Wisconsin did not have a Caribbean studies program (no U.S. universities did at the time). Dale found that U.S. history was too narrowly focused on the United States itself, and that this was a particular shortcoming for the study of slavery. His selection of Martinique for his graduate work was a compromise with Harvey Goldberg, whose work on French political history and Socialist politics at least offered some connection with France's Antillean colonies.

The key influences for Dale's heterodox interpretation of Marx are C.L.R. James, E. P. Thompson, Gyorgy Lukács, Karl Korsch, Renato Panzieri and *operaismo*, Roman Rosdolsky, Immanuel Wallerstein, Terry Hopkins, Fernand Braudel, Sidney Mintz, Catherine Coquery-Vidrovitch, Harvey Goldberg, Joan Scott, Georges Haupt, Detroit's worker-intellectual General Baker, and the Chicago surrealist Franklin Rosemont, to mention the most salient.

Dale's move to a teaching position in the Binghamton Sociology Department marked a new chapter. Dale taught there from 1976 until his retirement in 2020 and collaborated in the Fernand Braudel Center with Immanuel Wallerstein and Terence Hopkins.

The last two interviews, unlike the previous seven, were not on Skype (our standard means of communication). These final interviews were in Syracuse, where Dale was under treatment, and Dale and his wife Luiza Franco Moreira, were fighting his last battles. Naturally, Dale was exhausted from the treatment and from going back and forth between hospital and rehab. In these last two interviews, Dale's recollections were slower, but his memory, critical acumen, and sense of humor were all there.

Part I of this article (published in the Autumn/Spring 2025 issue of this journal) contained the following segments: I. Radical America; II. Juvenalia; III. From CLR James to the League of Revolutionary Black Workers; IV. Slavery and Capitalism; V. Autonomismo/Operaismo; VI. Wisconsin Byways; and VII. Paris Archives. Part II of this article (in this issue) contains the

following segments: VIII. Prelude to Binghamton; IX. Rosdolsky; X. Sidney Mintz; XI. Binghamton Networks; XII. Emancipation in the Circuit of Sugar; and Postscript.

### VIII. PRELUDE TO BINGHAMTON

**DALE:** I wrote a dissertation that stuck to the sources (Tomich 1975). I had a good chapter on the plantation; I had a reasonable chapter on the slaves. But there are other chapters that were just there, on the politics of the colonial administration and stuff like that. I had a monograph that would lend itself to a kind of comparative history. I wasn't happy about it, but I had no real clue of what to do with that.<sup>2</sup>

The dissertation was economic, but also political. Trying to focus on Martinique and bringing in French politics. I had certainly read *Black Jacobins* and *Capitalism and Slavery*. And I just instinctively felt the whole approach to American black history was inadequate because it was national. And I thought studying slavery—and this is all crazy stuff because of what subsequently happened—I thought by studying black history or Caribbean history, I would see black history in a wider global panorama. And the Caribbean seemed a very good place to do that. Sid (Mintz), in that sense, synchronized very much with both C.L.R. and with Eric Williams. I felt that was a kind of break out of US history, the provincialism of US history, so I was excited about that.

The way Wisconsin worked, I was petrified about publishing my dissertation, it had to be perfect. I came back, I wrote it up, I defended it. I applied to every job, everywhere, I got none of them. Then along came Binghamton.<sup>3</sup> And I didn't know where it was. What I knew is it was the place where Starobin had died. It was a terrible story. Bob Starobin was a wonderful guy and I liked him immensely. And he was very kind to me. I could only see it as a tragedy. He was a really good historian, wonderful family, and he got very tied up with the

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<sup>2</sup> [In the dissertation] I had the core of the plantation and production that came pretty much from C.L.R. The modernity of the plantation was the epigraph of the dissertation, too. I had this idea from everyone I read that I wasn't in the mode of production thing, this is something modern and new and slavery was modern and capitalist, and how did that work" (Tomich 2024, p. 340).

<sup>3</sup> Binghamton, in the "Southern Tier" of New York, was long a manufacturing locale with major shoe manufacturers Endicott-Johnson and the IBM headquarters in adjacent Endicott, until World War II. Binghamton's population was declining by the 1960s and is now at almost half its 1950s levels. The establishment of the State University of New York (SUNY) campus in Vestal (1950) gave the Binghamton region renewed impetus. Binghamton is named for William Bingham, reputedly the wealthiest man in the young American republic. Bingham made his initial fortune between 1776 and 1779 as agent/spy of the Continental Congress, as well as a privateer, smuggler, and (surely) slave trader... in Martinique.

Panthers and was running around the country. So I was just turned off by the whole thing.<sup>4</sup> But, when I came to Binghamton I began to see things—it was Terry [Hopkins], really—a different methodology, a different way of approaching the whole subject of slavery and capitalism.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Starobin had confrontations with Black activists over his interest in the history of personal relations between enslavers and the enslaved, particularly house servants and drivers. Starobin aimed to understand the complexity of African-Americans and the origin of divisions within the black community, often in evidence even in the militant Black 1960s. To the extent that “accommodation” (the key word) might imply an adaptation to enslavement and racism, it was (and of course remains) a most controversial topic.

The worst incident was actually in Detroit, in a conference at Wayne State University in February 1969. “Starobin’s session dissolved into a ‘terrible confrontation’ that surprised many of the white scholars in the audience” (McMillian, 2002, pp. 164-65) The panel included Genovese, historian Sterling Stuckey (then a Ph.D. student at Northwestern) and journalist and academic Julius Lester. Stuckey and Lester were prominent Black nationalists. Starobin gave a paper based on letters between house servants and drivers and their enslavers, which he had presented at the American Historical Association. Stuckey “ridiculed Starobin’s understanding” by reading aloud some letters from enslaved persons that Starobin had just read, except now “in an overly-sarcastic black dialect” (Forcey, 1978, p. 165). Lester also critiqued Starobin’s paper. Stuckey and Lester then walked out of the audience, “to thunderous applause.”

Starobin’s experience in Detroit did not, however, deter his activism or his scholarship. Starobin revised his Wayne State paper and published it with a note of appreciation to Stuckey, Genovese and Lester for their “incisive criticism” (Starobin, 1971). Lester later reconsidered his position in the Wayne State fracas. He apologized to Starobin and corresponded with him over several months (Lester, 1971).

While on a fellowship at Cornell, Starobin was involved in the Black students’ uprising there (April 1969). His BA was from Cornell, class of ‘61, and he had worked in the campus newspaper. The movement at Cornell caught national attention with magazine covers that featured Black students brandishing rifles. Starobin and three others were barred from protest activities on campus by an injunction (later lifted). Over the next year, Starobin’s personal situation worsened. In August 1970, Starobin wrote to Lester that he was caught in “the contradiction between my scholarly interests and profession and my desire to do more revolutionary deeds.” Starobin died by suicide a few months later.

Some have seen Starobin as a case study on the contradictions of US white radicalism in the 1960s. Lester’s text is perhaps the most eloquent. (See also Lichtenstein, 1991; McMillian, 2002). Others, like Lewis Feuer, invoked Starobin’s demise as a cautionary tale on the “mutual hatred, bitterness, and disillusionment” of the New Left in the 1970s and even as a reflection of its “patterns of suicidalism and terrorism” (Feuer, 1972, p. 173). There is a Binghamton dissertation in Political Science on Starobin (Forcey, 1978). Starobin’s upbringing and political roots had some bearing on his career; his father was a renowned journalist who was foreign editor of the *Daily Worker* in the early 1950s. One can only surmise what the impact of Starobin’s trajectory had on Dale at the time, and we did not speak much about the matter beyond these interviews. But the risks and contradictions of involvement in radical – and perhaps especially Black politics – for a white academic intellectual were up front and personal for Dale, who knew Starobin well, admired him, and would share Starobin’s well-founded skepticism about US academia.

<sup>5</sup> “What I do is take Immanuel’s’ problem or conception and rework it through in my own work on slavery through Terry’s method. If you read all the stuff that I’ve written, Terry’s method impregnates everything. It’s always there” (Tomich, 2024, p. 309).

## IX. ROSDOLSKY

**DALE:** In Binghamton, after the first two years teaching undergraduate classes, I began teaching the introductory world-system course with Wallerstein, as well as Theory (Theoretical Studies). I think students wanted me to teach it. Terry and Immanuel were very emphatic that it not be theory-theory, but that it be theory that spoke to the world-systems project, that it be linked to history. What I would say now is that I made the Theory course about Marxist method in history, which was the right thing to do.

In 1977, I got an NEH Summer grant to go to Martinique. I'd never been to Martinique. I got there, the archives were in really bad shape. They'd left them for almost a hundred years in a warehouse down by the bay. Humidity and animals that just chewed them all to shreds. In the film *Parole des Negres* they have this 1846 official bulletin, with all the trial proceeds in it. They open up a leatherbound book and it's beautiful, all paper. I never saw a document like that in three months. Everything was shredded and it was like trying to read a paper doily, and most of it would just crumble into dust when I opened the box.

What I want to tell you is that when the archive was closed—it's quite different now, I think—I would go down to the center of Fort-de-France, where there's a promenade, La Savanne, with the statue of Josephine. Off the other side is the restaurant bar that caters to the local planters, and no one else could go there. I sat on a bench under a palm tree, reading *Capital*, cover to cover. And what was really cool about it was on Sundays, back in the day, Frantz Fanon's brothers would take their Sunday stroll on the Savanne. So I think how cool it is to be sitting reading this in Martinique, where Fanon... And it's got to be good reading because it's not sitting in some library in Paris. Another angle. So that's when I read *Capital* all the way through and not just chapters.

**JUAN:** But not *Grundrisse* yet?

**DALE:** Right after that and when I had to teach it, I had read enough of *Grundrisse* to see that it was important. I probably read it for Rosdolsky's article on *New German Critique* (Rosdolsky, 1974).

It's a paper from a colloquium on the hundredth anniversary of *Capital* [1967], and it was delivered right before Poulantzas spoke.<sup>6</sup> And Rosdolsky's paper just blew that whole crowd. When I came already, I had read *History and Class Consciousness* and had read Korsch a a lot.

So Korsch and Lukacs, and then *Grundrisse* was the place to go. It had to be, because I was an editor of *New German Critique* when they published Rosdolsky [No. 3, Autumn, 1974]. It's a great article and I use it for everything.

**JUAN:** How did you become involved in *New German Critique*? Did they have a presence in Wisconsin?

**DALE:** Yeah, David Bathrick, the editor of *New German Critique*, lived two blocks from me and we became close friends. He published a lot of translations. My German was rudimentary but he wanted me on the editorial board.

**JUAN:** You were there for how many years?

**DALE:** Four years. It got to the point to—it was going in a direction where I really had nothing to contribute. They were getting off into more and more theoretical literary debates. But that issue with Rosdolsky articles is great. So I had done all these things. And none of that translated into anything academic for me.

**JUAN:** Yep, I know the feeling.

**DALE:** Being on the editorial board counted for nothing. In fact, I thought I had to hide it.

So let me see and just get this out of my head. I studied Rosdolsky and the *Grundrisse* side by side for a very long time. And that was really my fundamental experience. I spent two or three years where I didn't write anything. I was just reading Rosdolsky, *Grundrisse* and *Capital* and trying to think through the slavery business.

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<sup>6</sup> The symposium was held in Frankfurt in September 1967 and its proceedings were published the following year (Euchner and Schmidt, 1968). Rosdolsky's article was the opening paper of the colloquium. Rosdolsky was not on hand to read it for reasons of health; he died in Detroit one month later. In his paper, Rosdolsky foreshadowed the publication of his seminal work, *The Making of Marx's Capital* (first edition in German, 1968). *The Making of Marx's Capital* was published in English in 1980. Rosdolsky's paper (pp. 9-20 of the symposium proceedings) was indeed followed by Nicos Poulantzas' comments, pp. 21-30. Poulantzas' disagreements were fundamental. The true method of *Capital*, he contended, was not Hegelian but rather "presupposes a relative autonomy of the processes of thought vis-à-vis reality." Poulantzas' own presentation, which was the third paper in the symposium, was titled "Theory and History - Brief Remarks on the Subject of 'Capitals'."

Rosdolsky's article in *New German Critique* was a real turning point for me, because that's what got me into the *Grundrisse* and showed me how to read it. When we published that, Anson (Andy) Rabinbach called the Wayne State University History Department.<sup>7</sup> And when he asked the chair about Rosdolsky and the guy says, Rosdolsky, Rosdolsky... Oh, he must be the guy with the funny accent at the end of the hallway, I haven't seen him around for a while. And Rosdolsky had been dead for like five years. He lived in Detroit, that's how he wound up, in exile.

**JUAN:** He was in Wayne State formally for a year, and then apparently after that, he was in and out of Detroit, travelling to Europe, until he died in 1967.

**DALE:** If you read the things I wrote against Althusser, you can see all the things that Rosdolsky firmed up for me and gave me a framework. And then I went and read Rosdolsky's *The Making of Capital*. So, the course you took [in Binghamton] was really always about Capital. Adam Smith and Polanyi were there, but it was really about the *Grundrisse* and *Capital* and reading Rosdolsky.

**JUAN:** On Rosdolsky, several things stand out for me. He came from Galicia, a disputed territory, but he identified as Ukrainian. Rosdolsky had a strong agrarian background in his family and he was very historically minded; he researched Ukraine's rural history and has several writings on peasants. His father was an ethnographer and directed a museum. I had no sense of that background.

**DALE:** And Rosdolsky wrote a book on serfdom (1962). Ukraine has all these really theoretical, sophisticated roots. It turns out I'm sitting here with the book of Henryk Grossman, he's from Ukraine.<sup>8</sup>

**JUAN:** There's very interesting people from that area. Eugen Ehrlich, from Bukovina<sup>9</sup> who did sociology of law from a historical standpoint and studied peasant communities. Those

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<sup>7</sup> Besides Rosdolsky, in the early 1970s Wayne State's faculty included Martin Glaberman (who alternated teaching with auto factory work), and Oliver Cox in a visiting position. Connections between Rosdolsky and Cox are unknown.

<sup>8</sup> Henryk Grossman (1881-1950) was born in Galicia, the Austrian-ruled territory of partitioned Poland. He wrote *The Law of Accumulation and Breakdown of the Capitalist System*. (Leiden: Brill, 2021). See Rick Kuhn (2007). Haupt was Romanian, from Transylvania.

<sup>9</sup> Bukovina was part of Romania since 1918 but was eventually divided between Romania and Soviet (then independent) Ukraine.

were interests that Rosdolsky maintained throughout his life. Material that was published but also things that were never published, on peasant social relations and relationships between peasants and landholding classes, and were they feudal or not. Rosdolsky did a critique of Engels' characterization of certain agrarian sectors as progressive bourgeois.

**DALE:** Rosdolsky's book on "peoples without history" upends all of the Marx-Engels writing about that, from the point of view of Marx's own method.<sup>10</sup> So if you read the book on nationalities, it's all about Marxist method and how Marx violates his own method. The big thing particularly from the *New German Critique* article was the importance of form. The form, not talking about modes of production. I thought it was much more flexible and historical, which I think it is... He talked about Marx as theory of forms. So that was a way of really undoing the whole Althusserian, mechanical, reified set of categories.

**JUAN:** One of the articles on Rosdolsky has a critique of Martin Nicolau's foreword to *Grundrisse* and how he misunderstood the relationship between *Grundrisse* and *Capital* and treated *Grundrisse* as a very rough approach to the ideas that finally Marx got right in *Capital*. But Rosdolsky said, No, it's all the same. It's just the method of investigation following a more historical perspective.

**DALE:** That's where my theoretical history and historical theory comes from. Rosdolsky doesn't say it, but that's me thinking about the implications of that. The presentation is logical, theoretical. It presumes a history, but it's not the history. And England is an example. So, I think what I'm doing is pretty unorthodox but I think it's right. I don't know, I still have been working toward it, but I think all of *Capital* is just an elaboration of commodity fetishism. It's about reconstructing the fetish over and over and over through different determinations, it has to do with value, but you never see value. I don't know. I don't still understand it, but we can talk about it...

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<sup>10</sup>Friedrich Engels y el problema de los pueblos "sin historia": la cuestión de las nacionalidades en la revolución de 1849-49 a la luz de la "Neue Rheinische Zeitung". (Mexico: Ediciones Pasado y Presente, 1980) (Friedrich Engels and the problem of the "peoples without history": the question of nationalities in the Revolution of 1849-49 in light of the "Neue Rheinische Zeitung").

## X. SIDNEY MINTZ

**JUAN:** What was the first of Sid's work that you read?

**DALE:** Well, I don't know. I read scattered papers. He always seemed to explain a lot to me. So, I began. [For my Master's thesis] I was writing on Césaire, which was crazy because I didn't know anything about poetry. It was kind of a cultural political history of Césaire.

**JUAN:** You mentioned to me once how you found *Caribbean Transformations*...

**DALE:** That was the big thing. The History offices were right downtown. I had this discussion with Harvey, and we decided that I would do the Caribbean. And I walked out of his office and across the street, and there was in a used-bookshop window a copy of *Caribbean Transformations* for \$11, which was a lot for a book back then. And I ran in and bought it instantly and took it and read it cover to cover and just immersed myself in it. And that really gave me a kind of, you know, my take on the Caribbean, because I thought it meshed with Thompson and a lot of other stuff I was interested in. It was really cool. So, I just kept reading Sid because it was the best social history of labor. C.L.R. is great in certain ways, but Sid really kind of grounded things. I didn't know Sid at all.

**JUAN:** Where do you think that C.L.R. ended and Sid began? I mean in terms of your thematic.

**DALE:** C.L.R. James sticks close to an unorthodox reading of Marx that was very attractive to me. And for all the reasons we've talked about, I wanted to be a Marxist historian of a certain type, not a Stalinist, but I wanted to see something in Marx that would deepen my understanding of history. So, if I would study Marx more, I would understand history better. I always had a very systematic theoretical interest that never left me, though I was modest about calling myself a theoretician, and I always tried to give what I was doing

an empirical grounding. Partly because my German wasn't that good and I thought that to be a real Marxist theoretician I should be fluent in German, which I wasn't.

So, you get these really insightful things of Marxist inspiration from C.L.R.. At the end of the day, he would kind of give you an empirical example or fill them out. But then they stopped working, they would just kind of come to an end. Whereas I think Sid didn't have the big theoretical proposal, but he really showed how you could reconstruct working lives of, you know, a slave population. Each complemented the other. But the more I went with the history, I think the more Sid grounded me in that I really was trying to reconstruct specific contexts of action at a level that was not so easy to find in C.L.R. where it was kind of universal... I mean, it's not really universal in C.L.R., but I was trying to go beyond C.L.R. and really reconstruct the lives and experiences of working people in Martinique. That didn't really work because I didn't have the documentation, which I was very committed to. But it took me away into how to read the history of the plantation and the official documents that I had. So, counter all of the last thirty years of [inaudible], reading against the grain and so forth—and this goes back to E. P. Thompson—I always thought that historians read against the grain. You can't be a historian without reading against the grain. No one's writing the history for you, you've got to figure it out from what they've left and the historical documentation or just the traces that have been left behind.

So, I wrote a dissertation that was OK and in some ways interesting, but I didn't really like it. I was working that out. I had sent—preposterously, pretentiously—a copy to Sid. We had never met. And I believe he wrote me back a very nice letter, and he annotated my dissertation quite carefully and had all kinds of suggestions. Then Sid came to Binghamton that first year for a talk. I believe that's when I first met him, and I

got to spend a lot of time with him.<sup>11</sup> He was always kind to me and took an interest in me. After we met we wrote a lot, talked a lot. I can't give you a chronology. Several times I went to Baltimore and stayed with him for a weekend, or I would send him stuff I was writing. We went to some conferences and he would always yell at me for being a so-so speaker and not writing enough. Up to the end, I think he was quite surprised when we all went to Brazil (in 2009) because until he went there, I don't think he was aware what a life I carved out in Brazil instead of the US. I think he didn't expect that. He was always on my case. But he supported me, always wrote letters for me.

It was the great thing about Sid. He just took me under his wing, and he always treated me as if I was one of his students. Like in the videos that Olivia took at the Hotel Arpoador in Rio, Sid said, "Dale was never my student, but Dale's my student."<sup>12</sup> Everything I did about the Caribbean in a substantive way was really formed by the problems he set. I always thought it was amazing. We weren't his students, but he was interested in what we were doing. He just had a way of making complicated things simple and clear, which I still haven't mastered.

**JUAN:** Sidney had many strands in his work. One of the themes I was most interested was his approach to geography, ecology, material environmental history. What do you think yours were?

**DALE:** Also, that, but probably in a different way than you. Sid was really looking for a kind of spatial specificity and how specific geographies condition specific histories. So that was.

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<sup>11</sup> "I read Sid before I started working on the Caribbean, and then when I started to work on it, I read everything by him because I thought it just made everything so clear" (Tomich 2024, p. 342).

<sup>12</sup> Olivia Maria da Gomes Cunha, Professor of Anthropology at the Museu Nacional, Universidade Federal do Rio de Janeiro.

was a way to get a handle on the complexity of the Caribbean. So that was interesting to me.

**JUAN:** Sid's class characterization of peasants and proletarians was also important for me. And the way he constructed definitions that were perspectives more than definitions. For you it was more in terms of slaves. I was more interested in rural proletarians.

**DALE:** I thought the whole discussion was important because it brought labor into the history of slavery in a way that others didn't. And the labor was tied to the material processes of life, which then go back to geography. So, all of that seemed really good to me in terms of digging out of the hole. And there would be stuff that he would write to that I didn't get, and we would write about it. In some things we never connected with each other. He would write it, I would write, and we wouldn't connect to each other. The glaring example in my head now, which isn't really the most prominent one, was the whole thing about Black and Spanish, to see that as a product of linguistics.<sup>13</sup> I never got it. I thought there were so many other things you could look at and construct a rich historical explanation. But, you know, just things like that were just so unimportant given the richness of what he was doing.

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<sup>13</sup> In his later years, and specifically in *Three ancient colonies: Caribbean themes and variations* (2010), Mintz argued that the main dividing line in Caribbean history was not primarily race but rather language; in particular, whether or not a Kreyòl language developed in a given society. The premise was that such Kreyòls developed in the nominally anglophone, francophone and Dutch-speaking Caribbean, and that they did not develop at any time in the hispanophone Caribbean. In 2010, Dale interviewed Sid and produced a video titled *Caribbean Journey: Conversations with Sidney Mintz* (2011). The interview covers Sid's Caribbean career from his 1940s research in Puerto Rico. Towards the end of the interview, Dale questioned the validity of proposing Kreyòl languages as a "key" to Caribbean history. I shall focus here on Mintz's methodology of "successive approximations."

**JUAN:** There were approaches I missed in his work, major areas that would seem to be logical, reasonable extensions of his work; at least for comparative frameworks, for operationalizing his theories. One of those areas is Brazil that unfortunately he never looked at closely and where you worked so extensively. And I think it would have challenged and enriched his writings on peasants and slaves...Also, as we were talking before, the Saint Domingue revolution. He didn't focus on it, and it would have been an interesting counterpoint with C.L.R. James.

**DALE:** Absolutely. But I think that's where he was.

**JUAN:** On the other hand, Sid was among the first to really approach the Spanish Caribbean in a systematic way that allowed you to see it in tension especially with the British Caribbean, and not in an abstract way

**DALE:** Yes, there was something about what he did that broke down Eurocentrism or the components of it.

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From Dale's 2010 interview with Sid Mintz:

Tomich: Well, let me try to just push you a little bit on this, that one of the things that I think is distinctive about your work is that you've had a sustained reflection over many years on certain themes: rural proletarians, slaves and peasantry, the plantation, sugar. But you've never chosen one of them as the key to Caribbean history, and you've always looked at the relations among them over time and their ways, they combine with one another and the variations among them. [...]

Mintz: Yes, of course, I mean, I agree with you, and I think that I have tried to do what you're suggesting. It seemed to me, as I've worked over this material often through the years, that what I've wanted to do was to make successive approximations. And here I'm thinking about the work of a European historian, Jan Gross, who talks about thinking circularly and revisiting a number of themes repeatedly and making, as he says, I think, **successive approximations** of reality so that people end up not so much with conclusions about the angles and how it how it truly happened, not with a firm sense of that, but with a better sense of what the context was for these particular forces, how they worked in relationship to each other" (emphasis supplied).

Jan Gross called "successive approximations" a "circuitous effort" that may not produce an "either-or" story laid out in a chronological sequence." "Instead, we must poke the pile repeatedly from many directions and at different angles, or else important residue will always remain. What I offer here, therefore, is not diachronic but analytical history". "The flow of events is marked and distinct in the book, but it is also refracted in successive attempts to problematize issues from a perspective that is slightly but constantly changing.

Furthermore, the text is in dialogic relationship with the footnotes, sometimes closing off and sometimes opening up alternative interpretive vistas" (Gross, 2006, p: xiii).

**JUAN:** Though on the US, Sid's work was very limited. He really didn't deal much with it.

**DALE:** I always thought that as wonderful as Sid was, he was also kind of constrained by the Ivy League. And that he wasn't going to outstep his professional boundary. I know in certain cases he didn't. Anyhow, on a personal level Sid was just tremendously generous to me. Several times he would invite me down for the weekend, or there was this famous event with Richard Price and the Saramakas, and he said why don't you come down and stay with us and we'll go to this thing? It's always a bit mystifying. Here's this guy who was, you know, the prince, in my eyes. And just so just decent and kind to me and supportive of everything. Something about my work caught his eye. He helped me develop it.

Sid was the reason I went to Brazil. They wanted an American to replace Peter Eisenberg as I recall. And he said, why don't you take this guy? For a year as a Fulbright. Who was I? I was at the seventh year in Binghamton and hadn't published anything. Sid just said this is the guy you need to have. And so there I went. For me, it was really astounding. And, you know, like, I would buy him books and things and send to him. I was always very grateful and tried to reciprocate in some way. But who does that?

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In a 2019 manuscript, Dale used "successive approximations" as the title of a manuscript on Atlantic history. In the manuscript's introduction, he wrote: "'Successive approximations' effectively expresses the analytical and interpretive approach to Atlantic slavery that I have taken here as well as the structure of the book itself [...] My intention is not to write a general history of the Atlantic. Rather, through a series of interrelated chapters whose focus is at once historical and historiographical, I propose a theoretical-historical framework through which we might examine different dimensions of Atlantic history and their interrelation and explore new ways of thinking about slavery in the Americas."

**JUAN:** So like you've told me before, you can't try to read into Sid's work more than what he's saying; and that to look for deficiencies in his argument or for themes he should have explored, but didn't, is to not understand what he's doing. This was good advice when I was doing my dissertation, because I was frustrated about things that I thought Sid stated halfway or not usefully enough for what I was doing about peasants, rural proletarians, or his Puerto Rico research. Your advice was: take him at face value, look at what he's doing and run with it. And understand how this connects with Sid's views on field research. Sid loved field research, had a great respect and admiration for it and a healthy distrust of theory.

**DALE:** That was my take, because I thought that in the mid-seventies virtually all anthropology took the theoretical turn or the cultural turn, and he and Eric Wolf took a historical turn. They were already historical, but just the emphasis...That, to me, is what gave their work so much more importance and utility. And the theoretical critiques I thought were just uninteresting...you couldn't do anything with it.

**JUAN:** Sid was preoccupied and sometimes indignant with all the anthropological theorizing that was going on in the eighties and nineties, when he was still teaching. He was still keeping up with the literature to some extent in the nineties and early 2000s. I remember him once saying, the only anthropological works that anybody will be reading from these years, fifty years from now, are hard-core ethnographies that really take seriously what they are looking at, and describe it.

**DALE:** There was a similar discussion in Brazil [in 2010] with Olivia da Cunha and some of her colleagues who had gone so thoroughly into the cultural turn that they couldn't define culture. And Olivia asked Sid, do you really have to do fieldwork to do anthropology or

does anthropology really need fieldwork. And he said, well, yes and no, you can do anthropology on the basis of theory, but somebody has to do fieldwork. And unfortunately, the anthropologists aren't doing it. The people who are doing it are geographers. Then he went on a kind of effusive praise of Judith Carney's book on rice and slavery in South Carolina. I liked the book's argument on the hydraulic system in some ways, but I find it also very problematic in others.<sup>14</sup>

### XI BINGHAMTON NETWORKS

**DALE:** In Binghamton, I respected and worked within the world-system trajectory, but for Immanuel, I was never a real world-system guy and was always a little bit---as much as he depended on me for a lot of things—he never incorporated me and didn't know how to. One of my first-year students in the late seventies, said after the introductory world-systems course, “This is really funny, because what you say can contain everything Wallerstein says, and what Wallerstein says can't contain anything you're talking about.”<sup>15</sup>

**JUAN:** That was the kind of living contradiction there.

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By grounding the analysis of slavery in the multiple temporal planes and spatial extensions of the world economy, it is possible to specify the history of particular slave formations in relation to one another and to the capitalist world economy as a whole – and therefore to account for difference as well as commonality and continuity in the history of slavery and capitalism” (pp. i-ii). On the question of context, see below. There are of course substantial overlaps, and possible tensions, between “successive approximations” and “context.”

<sup>14</sup> Carney, 2001. On the Carolina Low Country's hydraulic system and its possible African origins, see Carney 2001, pp. 91 y 160. Not incidentally, Carney is a geographer.

<sup>15</sup> On Dale's career in Binghamton, see the introduction to the revised edition of *Slavery in the Circuit of Sugar*, pp. 23. Dale dedicated the book “to the memory of Harvey Goldberg, who showed me the power of history as a way of understanding the world, and to Immanuel Wallerstein, who provided the intellectual and institutional space in which I could develop my thinking.”

**DALE:** It was always difficult to manage my relationship with Immanuel. But also (a) I really respected Immanuel, and (b) there was no point in having that kind of fight with him. I tried to have dialogue with him a lot. But he didn't care. He was just doing his thing, and if you didn't fit into his thing, he didn't bother. So, I came to the position that, you know, it's not worth the effort to try to reform him because he's not going to change. Think about him as a big bulldozer because he's clearing all this stuff behind, and then you can come behind the space he's cleared out and do things he can't do; there's a great space to work.<sup>16</sup> That was important because the politics of the department kept me fighting on the side of Wallerstein and at the same time maintaining my own autonomy. Not getting caught up in conflicts, and thinking that Wallerstein and world-systems should be defended; and that the program Terry set up was to be defended. But also, I think given all the stuff you now know about my childhood, I wasn't made to be the disciple or whatever of anybody, you know? The world is a great puzzle for me and my own autonomy about figuring it out was everything.

**JUAN:** Well, you had a global view, of history, so you were closer to his outlook than most people. Most everybody else in the department was either into the US or into particular areas.

**DALE:** And even when I felt conceptually most estranged from him, the one thing that...Here's one for you. Wallerstein taught me to appreciate Braudel, and I wouldn't have without

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<sup>16</sup> **"It's important to talk about, because I'm the last survivor of the original group and there are people who write about it now, but they write about it from the outside.** But having said that, I was kind of inside and outside [...] I mean, I felt in a certain way constrained by the structure, but it was a totally open and creative place (Tomich, 2024: 306).

him. And that's kind of everything. Because of the social history thing I came out of was totally anti-Braudelian. And I came to Binghamton with anti-Braudelian prejudices. The other quote that's important for my convergence with world systems is what E. P. Thompson said that history is the discipline of context.<sup>17</sup> And I thought, well, if I want to look at slaves? as workers, what makes them different, from English factory workers, I got to figure out the context. And that got me to the world system. So those two things converge from different sides of the coin. That became the world system for me. And then, through Immanuel, I began to read and still am studying seriously Braudel, who was quite different. [Dale was watching Braudel interviews on YouTube at the time.]

**JUAN:** Definitely, I did not like Braudel at all. Initially it seemed to be like kind of a frozen way of doing history...But I think one thing that that Immanuel was quite aware of was space. Geography. That was always an important part of his work, though he didn't do as much with it as he could have. And Braudel was very forceful on space.

**DALE:** But he only went so far with time.

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<sup>17</sup> **"The discipline of history is, above all, the discipline of context;** each fact can be given meaning only within an ensemble of other meanings; while sociology, let us say, may put many questions to historical material which historians had not thought of asking, it is most unlikely that any 'sociological concept' can be taken, raw, from 20th-century suburbia (or from Melanesia) to 17th-century England, since the concept itself must be modified and refined before it will be appropriate to the ensemble of 17th-century meanings. This should not require saying: but there are fashions around which require it. [...] Only when the evidence is studied within its whole historical context – the rules and expectations of inheritance, the role of influence and interest, the bring fruitful results." "Each new concept must be thrust back into the ensemble of meanings of a specific historical context once again, and many of the concepts - perhaps the majority - will crumble to mere dust of irrelevancy in the immersion. Perhaps the continual making and breaking of the integument is the best that we can do" (Thompson, 1971, p. 45, emphasis supplied; see Calhoun, 1994, pp. 223-243).

Perhaps all that making and breaking does, after all, make for interesting bridges between "the discipline of context" and the "circuitous effort" of successive approximation.

**JUAN:** What do you mean by that?

**DALE:** Immanuel's time is fairly mechanical; it's some notion of *longue durée* that's undefined: Kondratiev Waves. If you read it, the Kondratiev waves are (a) the defining condition of capitalism, but (b) they're there before there's capitalism, there's no account of the origins of them mechanically as explanations. As John Higginson said, Kondratiev waves are like believing in the Force. And Immanuel's reading is like the Force. His waves explain but they're not explained... A lot of Immanuel's stuff in fact collapses into typologies, it comes partly from his formation as a sociologist.

**JUAN:** So how do you think that long waves can be reconceptualized?

**DALE:** I think they're a methodological tool. My article in that Braudel volume discusses Labrousse on the time cycles, agrarian cycles.<sup>18</sup> Everything has its temporality. The important thing is to think about things in terms of temporalities rather than static states of being. And there are different temporalities, some of which are real and some of which are fictitious, like I find myself attributing temporalities to things and don't have them, so it's worth it to figure out what they are. But I think the idea of plural times is quite productive. There's also event time or duration time...

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<sup>18</sup> Tomich, 2012. "For Labrousse temporality is at once an instrument of research and an organizing principle of historical processes. It is an analytically powerful tool that enables him to reconstruct temporal movements and economic cycles and to identify ruptures, accelerations, and reversals." The close connection that Labrousse establishes between the conceptual and the real, however, creates tensions that Dale addresses in the article.

## XII. EMANCIPATION IN THE CIRCUIT OF SUGAR

**JUAN:** What idea from your dissertation really changed when you did the book?

**DALE:** Half the concept left, because I stopped trying to do a total history of emancipation. But emancipation remained problem for the Martinique book. To write the history of emancipation, you almost need infinite time. In retrospect, the emancipation chapter of the book attempts a temporality that is different from the rest of the book.

So, in that chapter, the problem was that I tried to address emancipation as the outcome of the crisis I had described in the previous chapters. But there was a temporal shift in the process I was describing and that I did not make explicit. The real conclusion of the crisis of the plantation was not really at the time of emancipation but would come about decades later when the planters attempted to recapture the labor of the ex-slaves, who were making themselves into post-emancipation peasants as they tried to subordinate the sugar plantation to their own community and subsistence and livelihood.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> In the interview, Dale's thinking on the question of emancipation in *Slavery in the Circuit of Sugar* is compact and complex. Moreover, Dale's reflections connect his dissertation (1975), the first edition of *Slavery in the Circuit of Sugar* (1990), the concluding essay in *Through the Prism of Slavery* (1995), the new introduction and conclusion of *Circuit* (including the introduction's important footnotes), and two major articles in *Review* (2008, 2015a) among his later papers. So I should take a few lines to clarify my own thinking on this, and perhaps Dale's.

As I understand Dale's perspective, the complexity and temporality of the process of emancipation in Martinique went beyond the formal juridical freedom of the enslaved in 1848, and there was no "single cause of the crisis of the slave regime." (2016, p. 397). Over the past half-century, many historians have maintained (in the tradition of "history from below") that emancipation did have an overriding cause: the resistance of the enslaved and more broadly their **agency**, as a rebuttal to explanations centered on the declining profitability or morality of slavery.

But for Dale, the agency of the enslaved was not the whole story at all. He regarded agency as extremely important and in fact devoted a chapter of *Slavery in the Circuit of Sugar* (chapter 8) to a discussion of provision grounds and resistance, arguing that the activities of enslaved led to a crisis of the plantation. This is a crucial point that Dale would probably extend to post-"second slavery" societies in general.

"Given the prevalence of studies that emphasize the resistance and agency of subaltern groups, it is worth remembering that if we do not regard actors as formed through social relations and that these social relations provide the conditions, possibilities, and limits of action, **we risk treating agency as the attribute of the actors themselves rather than as the relation between actors and relations [...]** Actors are not first local and then become **global**" (Tomich, 2016, p. 421; my emphasis).

I wrote about this in *Through the Prism of Slavery*, but in my dissertation I got caught up in the “history from below” trap. My outlook was “history from below” but then I thought this should neatly lead directly to emancipation, it should make emancipation possible. To write about the history of emancipation, you needed a different spatial-temporal framework. Which would be really hard to put into that book unless I wrote a kind of French dissertation. Or would be a book in itself, because the temporalities are all different. It was a mistake to think that that’s where the book ended. The argument in the book ended, and it should have really ended with the chapter that I couldn’t write until after the book was published.

**JUAN:** So, what you’re saying is that you can’t really understand the substance of emancipation...what’s most important about emancipation...unless you look at what happened afterwards, after the formal decree?

**DALE:** No, what I’m saying is that the way I wrote it the slaves created the crisis by withdrawing their labor and appropriating garden plots, appropriating time and space and resisting and going on strike.

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The conditions of existence of French metropolitan and colonial capital were in continuous flux, caught in the crosswinds of “the world sugar market, the world division of labor, the colonial state and French national sugar market, the material and technical conditions of sugar production, and the master-slave relation”. (2016, p. 397) In a word, they were “contingent on definite conjunctures of the wider world-economy.” That is, I would say, contingent on specific **contexts**.

Prior to formal emancipation in 1848, the enslaved in Martinique created the crisis through their garden plots and their covert and overt resistance. Yet the conditions of freedom were not settled even in the short term, as various degrees of freedom/unfreedom were attempted by the colonial authorities, from the imposition of vagrancy laws to forms of sharecropping to wage labor; and the latter was not viable short of a “restructuring of the colonial economy”. (p. 190)

Formal emancipation was the horizon in Dale’s dissertation, and even in the first edition of *Slavery in the Circuit of Sugar*; but after the book was published in 1990 Dale became fully convinced that the process had to be viewed in a more open-ended, and in an optic both short- and long-term. Dale’s reassessment was reflected in the last essay in *Prism* (1995) and in the revised edition of *Slavery in the Circuit of Sugar* (2016). The undoing of the plantation system (while a complex story that merits close attention) did not equal emancipation, an open-ended process subject to a swiftly evolving conjunctures in 1848 and years thereafter.

**JUAN:** So, the slaves created the crisis...

**DALE:** That was the background for the politics of emancipation, which are so screwy. Because first, there's a Republic in France. The slaves hear about that, and they have an uprising across the island and force the local authorities to abolish slavery. Then another boat comes and says that the Assembly in France had abolished slavery before it happened in the island. And then there's this complex struggle between the new Republican state, the colonialists, the reactionary interests, the planters, the slaves. It's really complicated, and it has its own temporality that's all in the short term. And you have to talk more about the state; you have to talk about the different political actors to get that right. And that was a different thing than what I had written about. Some of that was in the old thesis, but even that was sort of inadequate to really do the politics of emancipation. And then the real trick is, once they were emancipated, the slaves had no political choice but to elect Schoelcher as their representative because they didn't have a spokesman, and Schoelcher was really on their side in the way he could be on their side. So, there's all this complex interplay of interests in the short term, that you'd have to lay out and what the politics between the free people of color and the whites and the blacks. And it's complicated.

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As Dale mentions in the interview, he addressed these issues in the revised 2016 edition. Yet the problem of the relations of the crisis of the plantation and emancipation was never quite entirely settled for him. "But, you know, I still feel I never quite got all that right." Moreover, "the conclusion ought to be the article in *Prism*" (see below) That's essentially what Dale says in the single footnote to the revised conclusion of *Circuit*: "I have discussed the initiatives of the emancipated population in Martinique to define and extend the gains that they had achieved while still enslaved after the abolition of slavery in 1848 and the efforts of the colonial state to contain their efforts in *Through the Prism of Slavery*, pp. 173–91." (2016: 421)

The 1995 article in *Prism* hewed closer to Dale's historical research and briefly discussed alternate forms of labor after emancipation. Indeed, at one point in the interview Dale remarks that material on the colonial state and political actors in his *dissertation* had become germane to his later approach. "Some of that was in the old thesis, but even that was sort of inadequate to really do the politics of emancipation."

Dale reworked this major problem throughout his career, constantly returning to it from new angles, refining his methodological approach, and relying on renewed theoretical reflection to articulate it. (see the footnotes to the Introduction, 2016). This process of continued elaboration was no less than the process of "successive approximations" that Dale proposed elsewhere in his writings. The organization of *Slavery in the Circuit of Sugar* followed this approach: "Each chapter successively moves out from the preceding ones to examine a particular aspect of the slave/sugar complex, itself partial and abstract, and incorporates it into the analysis by examining its interrelation, interdependence, and interaction with other relations and processes forming the world economic whole (2016: 40).

**JUAN:** So the slaves' agency is not the whole story at all.

**DALE:** No, exactly. But, you know, they had agency. They ended through a revolt... slavery. And I think it's fair to say there wouldn't have been the revolt if there hadn't been these struggles against the sugar regime... But the sugar regime labor politics don't explain the revolt and its consequences. The real ....

**JUAN:** They would have been left halfway. If the slaves hadn't revolted, they would have found ways of binding them to the land.

**DALE:** Yes. So rather than trying to explain everything, which was my temptation, especially with history from below and slave self- emancipation, the better ending would have been just to say that the slaves' initiative forced the local conditions of emancipation and the long-term question was what happened afterwards. Because it wasn't that some higher political or economic logic dictated emancipation, it was the slaves' resistance. How did they resist? Well, look at that chapter that ends *Prism*. They try to appropriate land, the houses, the gardens for themselves. And if not drop out of plantation labor, subordinate it to village life. So the struggle of post-emancipation politics is how do you recapture labor that has escaped and has destroyed slavery. I should have just said that emancipation concludes the temporality of this struggle against plantation production. Not get into the complexities; and that was hard to do. I had to get the book done to get

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A related, broader insight that consolidated Dale's reinterpretation of emancipation in Martinique turned on the relationship between that island and the world system. This insight would be fundamental to Dale's conception of the second slavery and to his later work generally. It appears in an interview conducted by two of Dale's Brazilian colleagues, Leonardo Marques and Tâmis Parron. (Tomich 2019a, p.781; see also Tomich 2020, which excerpts this exact quote). Given the significance of Dale's remarks on this point, I also refer to the original text in Portuguese. "As I wrote the book on Martinique, the big break-through for me was that you could have the world-system as the unit of analysis and Martinique as the object or unit of observation. [*À medida que escrevia o livro sobre a Martinica, o momento em que realmente deslanchei foi quando percebi que poderia ter o sistema-mundo como a unidade de análise e a Martinica como o objeto ou unidade de observação.*] As I kept this in mind when I came up with the idea of the Second Slavery [*Enquanto mantinha isso em mente e desenvolvia a ideia de segunda escravidão*], I said to myself: it is really a question of specifying what the part is [*o que é a parte*]; and by showing how the processes creating Martinique are different from the processes creating Cuba you are also saying something about the character of the world-economy. Admitting [*Considerar*] the whole as universal and heterogeneous requires having a clear distinction between the unit of analysis and the unit of observation" (Tomich 2019a, p. 779).

tenure. I hadn't really worked on that yet. And also, you know, critical of myself. I thought with, you know, my whole history-from-below thing that emancipation ought to have been the end, and the end ought to be the political history of emancipation. And everything we just talked about leaves out the complexities of metropolitan politics around emancipation. So, it would have been a whole different book. And my mistake was I tried to make it the end. I only had time to write the other thing once the book was for the publisher. And then I saw years later, this was stupid, this should have been the end. But they had no conditions to do that. I think I tried to address that in the revised second edition. But, you know, I still feel I never quite got all that right.

**JUAN:** What did you revise in the second edition?

**DALE:** I tried to revise the conclusion. I haven't read it since I wrote it, but it was basically to say this: that I didn't get this right and that the conclusion ought to be the article in *Prism*.

**JUAN:** But then what you're saying is much the case also with Saint-Domingue. You always hear about the slave revolution in Saint-Domingue. They slaves didn't rebel until 1791, though the whole process had begun in 1789 in France and Oge, and the mulattoes who were very important, in Saint-Domingue and in the metropolis. Plus, the struggle between the whites that James addresses in large part. Do you think that was the approach that was necessary to do the full story on Martinique, or were there things in C.L.R. James' account of Saint-Domingue that...

**DALE:** But Martinique was a dying island at the time, hanging on to the subsidies because they can't produce and compete. There's all kinds of stuff going on. France wants a maritime presence somehow. The other thing I could have emphasized more is the whole impetus to reconstructing the sugar industry and slavery was to rebuild French maritime and commercial power. The real colonists in France were more interested in Algeria. The problem was you couldn't just give up Martinique and Guadeloupe, but what the hell are you going to do with them?

**JUAN:** Certainly, in the 1840s France was making a very active push for people to emigrate to Algeria, a lot of taking over land. Martinique wasn't the booming colony that Saint-Domingue had been.

**DALE:** Yes, and if you follow it over the long term, French colonialism just subsidized the rich white families of Martinique. All the sugar plantations by the 1870s became rum factories because they couldn't make sugar.

**JUAN:** In terms of methodology, perhaps what James did on Saint-Domingue could also be done on Martinique. The coordinates that James worked on were interesting, though he didn't do a whole lot with production. It was more a political history.

**DALE:** My problem [in *Slavery in the Circuit of Sugar*, first edition] was that I tried to squeeze the political emancipation into the story I had told, and that was just a mistake. Remember what I said, I wanted to do slaves as workers. And I did. See, that's where Sid was important because the proto-peasants, post-emancipation peasantry were really important ideas to see what was going on, to see the flexibility everything made. But that should have been it.<sup>20</sup>

But again, for an academic audience, I didn't feel I could cite this off-beat Marxism particularly well. It just would have created more confusion. I never even talked about Marxism *per se*. If I had talked about the law of value, then the Martinique book would have been much simpler. But I felt I had to write around it, because as soon as you say those things, people's eyes start to spin. So, you know, I had no immense family fortune. I had to get the job or die because I never would've been able to get another job anywhere else.

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<sup>20</sup> "The dissertation is kind of a linear political economic history of Martinique with a big emphasis on the plantation. And eventually, you know, it took me three or four drafts, rewriting the dissertation took me years" (Tomich, 2024, p. 342).

And the thing is how I really wrote the book in Brazil.<sup>21</sup> You remember you took me to the airport to Brazil with all those bags of notes. And then I came back and in 1985 I had to give a talk, my first talk, at a World Systems conference in New Orleans [PEWS, Political Economy of the World System]. This is where I hung out with Sid, and Moreno [Fraginals] was there and I didn't do it.<sup>22</sup> And then I thought of the idea of second slavery and wrote the paper in two weeks. Came up with something, and that was it. I mean, the second slavery just bangs out of the Martinique book. Somehow, when I had the second slavery idea, I wanted for a long time to write the second slavery book. Instead, I wound up more organizing networks of people interested in the idea of the second slavery... Anyhow, I'm having a hard time speaking, projecting my voice, but this is a really lovely and important conversation.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> "Dale started writing the book in Brazil. I remember when he wrote the first paragraph. That was in '83. Then we were married and lived in Binghamton from '84 to '86, then moved to Ithaca. He had a first manuscript, and then he came up with the idea that the chapter on the plantation was the crucial one. (Chapter 5, "The Habitation Sucrière: Cell Unit of Colonial Production") We were living in Ithaca then. It must have been before '89. He rewrote the whole thing quickly, then sent it to Johns Hopkins and they accepted it." Personal communication, Luiza Franco Moreira, July 5, 2025.

<sup>22</sup> Dale apparently did not present at the 1985 New Orleans PEWS conference, but a paper by Dale was included as part of the conference proceedings, titled "White Days, Black Days: The Working Day and the Crisis of Caribbean Slavery." Ninth Annual Session, Political Economy of the World System (1985). Dale had begun the book on Brazil, and Moreno Fraginals is everywhere in the text. It was during the process of writing *Circuit* and grappling with Moreno Fraginals' strongly technological account of the Cuban sugar industry that the concept of "second slavery" came to be. "Manuel Moreno Fraginals's *The Sugarmill* was a constant reference while writing *Slavery in the Circuit of Sugar*. It quickly became apparent to me that the combination of factors that inhibited the restructuring of sugar production and the reproduction of slave relations in Martinique did not operate in the same way or have the same consequences in Cuba. This is the origin of the concept that I have come to call 'the second slavery' (see Tomich, 2004, esp. pp. 56–71)." An abbreviated version of *The Sugarmill* was published in English 1976, but Dale used the three-volume original Cuban edition of *El ingenio* (1978).

<sup>23</sup> These last few lines are from the actual end of the ninth and final interview (June 14, the same afternoon as the eighth interview; hence Dale's reference to two sessions). In the interview, these lines closed the section on Sidney Mintz. In this edited version, it seemed fitting to close with the section on *Slavery in the Circuit of Sugar*.

**JUAN:** It's getting late, let's take a break.

**DALE:** Ok, well, this was good. So enjoying the talk that I ... We got really two good sessions in there, I think.

**JUAN:** Let's see how they come out.

### POSTSCRIPT

When several of Dale's former students and colleagues decided to do a dossier on his work, my initial proposal was a "Dale's reading list" that would comprise the authors he recommended to his students, from C. L. R. James and E. P. Thompson to Korsch and Rosdolsky. Dale's response to my proposal was diffident, as he was about any recognition of his intellectual impact. His response did not improve when I proposed doing an interview or two, beginning with his early years in Milwaukee. Yet as Luiza tells me, Dale's response gradually became a more compliant "Well, Juan wants me to do these interviews." Dale sensed that this might be his last opportunity to talk on record at some length about his life and thought; and he was welcoming the dialogue.

In the interviews, I asked about aspects of Dale's life and intellectual formation that I knew little about and which intersected with mine. My college years in Philadelphia overlapped with Dale's in graduate school. Along the way, I did not find convincing frameworks for approaching the past and present of Puerto Rico and its relationship with the Caribbean; nor had I developed a self-reliant outlook on academia. I wound up in grad school in Binghamton in the late 1970s -- the heady first years of its Sociology Department and Braudel Center as a premier hotspot of historical theory. And, Dale was there after wanderings of his own, challenging disciplinary boundaries with an evolving methodology that reframed the history of a neighboring island even smaller than mine.

Phillip McMichael, who is Professor Emeritus of Global Development at Cornell, described his and Dale's early years in Binghamton:

"During my last year in '76-77 in residence as a grad student, Dale and I spent all our spare time reading Grundrisse and Capital together -- essentially interested in the methodological possibilities we could glean. It was an extremely formative period and laid the foundations for a long term back and forth relationship where Dale and I exchanged drafts of things we were writing -- right up to last year before he died. It's interesting that my work on food regimes evolved along the lines of viewing (and working with) the international peasant movement from the 1990s on as global actors/agents, much like Dale viewed slaves as global actors."

Enrico dal Lago published an excellent analysis of Dale's work in *New Left Review* shortly after Dale's passing (Dal Lago, 2025).<sup>24</sup> In a personal communication, Dal Lago noted the relevance of Dale's intellectual formation to his later work.

"It's particularly fascinating to see how Dale's intellectual trajectory is a prime example of E.P. Thompson's 'history is the discipline of context.' The context of

the sixties and seventies in which Dale moved comes out alive and very powerful in the larger-than-life personalities of legendary scholars with whom he crossed path, or collaborated with, at different points in time, while studying and at the same time being involved, as most in the left were back then, in addressing important issues of social justice through different forms of activism.

“The interview is not only a wonderful way of remembering the great scholar and great person that Dale was, but is also a magnificent window into a largely disappeared, but once extraordinarily vibrant, world, one in which scholarship and active engagement went hand in hand, and where the debates on the interpretation of the past had a major influence on the interpretation of the present.” (Personal communication, August 22, 2025).

Reinaldo Funes Monzote collaborated with Dale in the *Landscapes of Slavery* project. He wrote on the experience:

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<sup>24</sup> We were both skeptical of Wallerstein’s world-systems analysis, which is why I eventually published my critique in the 1990 incorporated comparison article (even so Immanuel, who was editing an issue of the *International Social Science in 1992*, invited me to contribute a restatement of my method – a generous gesture). And following Wallerstein’s signal intervention Dale and I spent a lot of time figuring out and publishing pieces on the rise of historical capitalism, and the formation of the state system. (See McMichael 1990, 1992, 2000; Personal communication, August 14, 2025).

“Like many Cubans who have researched the world of sugar in the 19th century, with its far-reaching ramifications, the closest point of reference is usually the other Antilles as a precedent. However, placing the rise of the slave-based sugar plantation in Cuba in the first half of the 19th century alongside the coffee boom in Brazil and the cotton boom in the southern United States is fundamental to understanding Cuban specificity within the Caribbean context itself and its early connections with the Industrial Revolution. [...] “Although four co-authors appear in *The Landscapes of Slavery*, there should be no doubt that Dale undertook most of the work and conception of the book. However, for Dale the most important thing was that it be a team effort, and he maintained this throughout. In so doing, Dale reaffirmed what we perceived in his character from the beginning: his generosity and his collaborative spirit, without any hierarchical pretension given the material differences between our respective academic backgrounds.” (Personal communication, 13 October 2024)

Andrej Grubačić, Professor of the Anthropology and Social Change at the California Institute of Integral Studies and past editor of the JWSR was Dale’s colleague at the Braudel Center and in the Sociology Department at Binghamton. Andrej had the opportunity to express his appreciation in a 2020 email to Dale:

I think of my work as theoretical history: a specific combination of world-systems analysis, Hegelian Marxism, and anarchist anthropology. Needless to say, with the exception of anarchist anthropology, I learned how to develop my thinking about this relationship from you. So it becomes a conversation between Marx, Braudel, Wallerstein, and Kropotkin. Through the Prism of Dale. As I told our other cuz, everything I know about world-systems, or more accurately, about Wallerstein, Marx and Braudel, came from you. But in an unusual way. I don't think I ever told you how important to me this unusual way is, and how grateful I am to you. When I arrived to Binghamton, I was ready to give up on both Braudel (even though I was schooled in Braudelian structuralism) and on Marx (despite my involvement with the remnants of the Praxis group). And then, on top of this, I had to face what to me appeared to be a closed system: world of structures, world without struggles, world of fixed categories, without air to breathe. I was desperate. I had to look elsewhere. To the world of (premature) agency. I went to *Many Headed Hydras*, to *Poverty of Theory*, to *History from Below*. And throughout all this, you were there for me, never telling me what to do. You would listen patiently to what I had to say and ask, and you would push me to examine this line of thinking, even when you were in disagreement with it (I did not know it at the time...).

In a certain sense, I had to learn how to become an intellectual both because and in spite of you. And that is the single most valuable gift of my graduate studies. One day you gave me Kosik--whom we read in Praxis, as well as Korsh-- and then Sayer and Sohn Rehtel. And I went to the Prism and re-read it. The chapters on Martinique were crucial: world economy, provisional grounds, expropriation of time and space, and proto-peasantry. And then I went to Braudel and re-read it. And then I went back to Wallerstein. And the world (system) exploded. All of sudden, the fixed categories dissolved. Not only of Immanuel's world-systems, but also my own. I was able to re-relate to Marxism, free of violent abstractions. I was able to see gift and mutual aid as components and relations within an open and concrete totality, to distinguish between objects and units, between analysis and observation, between units and the whole, between theory and history. I have rediscovered history, Marxism, and world-systems. Anxious search for periphery and semiperiphery--which one is it, I have to find out!-- were not my navigation tools. The interesting thing to me, in retrospect, is that you have never taught me this. You made me curious. There is so much difference between the two. What I learned from this Brazilian interview (published in English, by the way), was that this was not an accident, but a careful pedagogical gesture. Thank you.

Dale's reply to Andrej was brief, affecting, and just Dale:

“Dear Andrej,  
I am touched, taken aback, and a little self-conscious about this eloquent and moving statement. It means a lot to me, especially coming from you. All I can really say is that this is the sort of thing that we almost never say. But then when it is too late, wish that we had. Maybe we ought to say them more often, both for ourselves and others.”

Dale's students likewise appreciated his intellect, his generosity and especially how he established a context where his students could reach their own conclusions while gaining a shared historical sense of theory. Kolya Abramsky, a former PhD student of Dale's, wrote:

"I increasingly realized Dale actually was the key bridge between the two schools of thought that I went to Binghamton determined to connect – World-Systems Analysis and Autonomist Marxism (schools of thought which to many people seemed totally different from one another). Dale, by his rejecting the rigidity of subscribing to formally labelled schools of thought, and his insistence on a rigorous materialist analysis grounded in the study of concrete social relations in concrete geographical locations at concrete moments in historical time, was the perfect bridge. Dale connected me to many fascinating ideas, authors, and texts, that I was unlikely to have found my own way to, and whom no one else was pointing me towards either. [...] One field where Dale really got through to me was in helping me to understand dialectics and the relation between form and essence. [...] He helped me to understand what it means when something abstract is 'in motion' and to understand how an essence continues to exist over time while shedding one form and adopting another."<sup>25</sup>

As recounted in the interviews, Dale's trust in his own intellectual abilities stemmed from an upbringing where he had often felt rather out of place and where he honed his powers of observation. Deindustrializing Milwaukee encapsulated large-scale change on the march, with ideas of race and class fast changing on the way. In Wisconsin, Dale's wariness about student activism stemmed from that background and from his experience with radicals who could afford to get in trouble. His skepticism about academia was profound but was always countered by conviction about the possibilities of the university, especially the public university. All these dimensions connected with questions of my own, and Dale always helped to make them more explicit and thought-out. Never by straightforward and final answers, always by "successive approximations," with close attention to theory as well as to the perils of false abstraction.

Dale's reading list, thought-provoking as it is, could not top that.

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Giusti-Cordero was a student of Dale Tomich at SUNY-Binghamton during early, defining years of Binghamton Sociology. Tomich was his dissertation chair and mentor, and they remained close friends through the years.

**Disclosure Statement:** Any conflicts of interest are reported in the acknowledgments section of the article's text. Otherwise, authors have indicated that they have no conflict of interests upon submission of the article to the journal.

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<sup>25</sup> "Some Memories and Reflections about Dale the Connector, Dale the Bridge, and Dale the Dialectician."  
Unpublished text, August 2025.

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