SIDNEY W. MINTZ

SWEETNESS AND POWER

THE PLACE OF SUGAR IN MODERN HISTORY

ELISABETH SIFTON BOOKS
VIKING

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Introduction

This book has an odd history. Though it was completed only after a recent and sustained period of writing, much of it grew from skimmings and impressions collected over many years of reading and research. Because of its subject matter, it is a figurative sort of homecoming. For nearly the whole of my professional life, I have been studying the history of the Caribbean region and of those tropical products, mainly agricultural, that were associated with its "development" since the European conquest. Not all such products originated in the New World; and of course none of them, even those that were indigenous, became important in world trade until the late fifteenth century. Because they were produced thereafter for Europeans and North Americans, I became interested in how those Europeans and North Americans became consumers. Following production to where and when it became consumption is what I mean by coming home.

Most people in the Caribbean region, descendants of the aboriginal Amerind population and of settlers who came from Europe, Africa, and Asia, have been rural and agricultural. Working among them usually means working in the countryside; getting interested in them means getting interested in what they produce by their labor. Because I worked among these people—learning what they were like, what their lives were made into by the conditions they lived under—I inevitably wanted to know more about sugar and rum and coffee and chocolate. Caribbean people have always been entangled with a wider world, for the region has, since 1492, been

caught up in skeins of imperial control, spun in Amsterdam, London, Paris, Madrid, and other European and North American centers of world power. Someone working inside the rural sectors of those little island societies would inevitably be inclined, I think, to view such networks of control and dependence from the Caribbean vantage point: to look up and out from local life, so to speak, rather than down and into it. But this insider's view has some of the same disadvantages as the firmly European perspective of an earlier generation of observers for whom the greater part of the dependent, outer, non-European world was in most ways a remote, poorly known, and imperfect extension of Europe itself. A view that excludes the linkage between metropolis and colony by choosing one perspective and ignoring the other is necessarily incomplete.

Working in Caribbean societies at the ground level, one is led to ask in just what ways beyond the obvious ones the outer world and the European world became interconnected, interlocked even; what forces beyond the nakedly military and economic ones maintained this intimate interdependence; and how benefits flowed, relative to the ways power was exercised. Asking such questions takes on a specific meaning when one also wants to know in particular about the histories of the products that colonies supply to metropolises. In the Caribbean case, such products have long been, and largely still are, tropical foods: spices (such as ginger, allspice, nutmeg, and mace); beverage bases (coffee and chocolate); and, above all, sugar and rum. At one time, dyes (such as indigo and annatto and fustic) were important; various starches, starch foods, and bases (such as cassava, from which tapioca is made, arrowroot, sago, and various species of *Zamia*) have also figured in the export trade; and a few industrial staples (like sisal) and essential oils (like vetiver) have mattered; bauxite, asphalt, and oil still do. Even some fruits, such as bananas, pineapples, and coconuts, have counted in the world market from time to time.

But for the Caribbean region as a whole, the steady demand overall and for most epochs has been for sugar, and even if it is now threatened by yet other sweeteners, it seems likely to continue to hold its own. Though the story of European sugar consumption has not been tied solely to the Caribbean, and consumption has risen steadily worldwide, without regard to where the sugar

comes from, the Caribbean has figured importantly in the picture for centuries.

Once one begins to wonder where the tropical products go, who uses them, for what, and how much they are prepared to pay for them—what they will forgo, and at what price, in order to have them—one is asking questions about the market. But then one is also asking questions about the metropolitan homeland, the center of power, not about the dependent colony, the object and target of power. And once one attempts to put consumption together with production, to fit colony to metropolis, there is a tendency for one or the other—the "hub" or the "outer rim"—to slip out of focus. As one looks at Europe the better to understand the colonies as producers and Europe as consumer, or vice versa, the other side of the relationship seems less clear. While the relationships between colonies and metropolis are in the most immediate sense entirely obvious, in another sense they are mystifying.

My own field experiences, I believe, influenced my perceptions of the center-periphery relationship. In January 1948, when I went to Puerto Rico to start my anthropological fieldwork, I chose a south-coast municipality given over almost entirely to the cultivation of sugar cane for the manufacture of sugar for the North American market. Most of the land in that municipality was owned or leased by a single North American corporation and its landholding affiliate. After a stay in the town, I moved to a rural district (*barrio*); there, for slightly more than a year, I lived in a small shack with a young cane worker.

Surely one of the most remarkable things about Barrio Jauca—and, indeed, about the entire municipality of Santa Isabel at the time—was its dedication to sugar cane. In Barrio Jauca, one stands on a vast alluvial plain, created by the scouring action of once-great rivers—a fertile, fanlike surface extending from the hills down to the Caribbean beaches that form Puerto Rico's south coast. Northward, away from the sea and toward the mountains, the land rises in low foothills, but the coastal land is quite flat. A superhighway from northeast to southwest now passes nearby, but in 1948 there was only a single tarred road, running due east-west along the coast, linking the roadside villages and the towns—Arroyo, Guayama, Salinas, Santa Isabel—of what was then an immense, much-

developed sugar-cane-producing region, a place where, I learned, North Americans had penetrated most deeply into the vitals of pre-1898 Puerto Rican life. The houses outside the town were mostly shacks built on the shoulders of roads—sometimes clustered together in little villages with a tiny store or two, a bar, and not much else. Occasionally, an unarable field could be found, its saline soil inhibiting cultivation, on which a few woebegone goats might graze. But the road, the villages stretched along it, and such occasional barren fields were the only interruptions to the eye between mountains and sea; all else was sugar cane. It grew to the very edge of the road and right up to the stoops of the houses. When fully grown, it can tower fifteen feet above the ground. At its mature glory, it turned the plain into a special kind of hot, impenetrable jungle, broken only by special pathways (*callejones*) and irrigation ditches (*zanjas de riego*).

All the time I was in Barrio Jauca, I felt as if we were on an island, floating in a sea of cane. My work there took me into the fields regularly, especially but not only during the harvest (*zafra*). At that time most of the work was still done by human effort alone, without machines; cutting "seed," seeding, planting, cultivating, spreading fertilizer, ditching, irrigating, cutting, and loading cane—it had to be loaded and unloaded twice before being ground—were all manual tasks. I would sometimes stand by the line of cutters, who were working in intense heat and under great pressure, while the foreman stood (and the *mayordomo* rode) at their backs. If one had read about the history of Puerto Rico and of sugar, then the lowing of the animals, the shouts of the *mayordomo*, the grunting of the men as they swung their machetes, the sweat and dust and din easily conjured up an earlier island era. Only the sound of the whip was missing.

Of course, the sugar was not being produced for the Puerto Ricans themselves: they consumed only a fraction of the finished product. Puerto Rico had been producing sugar cane (and sugar in some form) for four centuries, always mainly for consumers elsewhere, whether in Seville, in Boston, or in some other place. Had there been no ready consumers for it elsewhere, such huge quantities of land, labor, and capital would never have been funneled into this

one curious crop, first domesticated in New Guinea, first processed in India, and first carried to the New World by Columbus.

Yet I also saw sugar being consumed all around me. People chewed the cane, and were experts not only on which varieties were best to chew, but also on how to chew them—not so easy as one might expect. To be chewed properly, cane must be peeled and the pith cut into chewable portions. Out of it oozes a sticky, sweet, slightly grayish liquid. (When ground by machine and in large quantities, this liquid becomes green, because of the innumerable tiny particles of cane in suspension within it.) The company went to what seemed like extreme lengths to keep people from taking and eating sugar cane—there was, after all, so much of it!—but people always managed to lay hands on some and to chew it soon after it was cut, when it is best. This provided almost daily nourishment for the children, for whom snagging a stalk—usually fallen from an oxcart or a truck—was a great treat. Most people also took the granular, refined kind of sugar, either white or brown, in their coffee, the daily beverage of the Puerto Rican people. (Coffee drunk without sugar is called *café puya*—"ox-goad coffee.")

Though both the juice of the cane and the granular sugars were sweet, they seemed otherwise quite unrelated. Nothing but sweetness brought together the green-gray cane juice (*guarapo*) sucked from the fibers and the granular sugars of the kitchen, used to sweeten coffee and to make the guava, papaya, and bitter-orange preserves, the sesame and tamarind drinks then to be found in Puerto Rican working-class kitchens. No one thought about how one got from those giant fibrous reeds, flourishing upon thousands of acres, to the delicate, fine, pure white granular food and flavoring we call sugar. It was possible, of course, to see with one's own eye how it was done (or, at least, up to the last and most profitable step, which was the conversion from brown to white, mostly carried out in refineries on the mainland). In any one of the big south-coast mills (*centrales*), Guánica or Cortada or Aguirre or Mercedita, one could observe modern techniques of comminution for freeing sucrose in a liquid medium from the plant fibers, the cleansing and condensation, the heating that produced evaporation and, on cooling, further crystallization, and the centrifugal brown sugar that was then

shipped northward for further refining. But I cannot remember ever hearing anyone talk about making sugar, or wonder out loud about who were the consumers of so much sugar. What local people were keenly aware of was the *market* for sugar; though half or more of them were illiterate, they had an understandably lively interest in world sugar prices. Those old enough to remember the famous 1919–20 Dance of the Millions—when the world market price of sugar rose to dizzying heights, then dropped almost to zero, in a classical demonstration of oversupply and speculation within a scarcity-based capitalist world market—were especially aware of the extent to which their fates lay in the hands of powerful, even mysterious, foreign others.

By the time I returned to Puerto Rico a couple of years later, I had read a fair amount of Caribbean history, including the history of plantation crops. I learned that although sugar cane was flanked by other harvests—coffee, cacao (chocolate), indigo, tobacco, and so on—it surpassed them all in importance and outlasted them. Indeed, the world production of sugar has never fallen for more than an occasional decade at a time during five centuries; perhaps the worst drop of all came with the Haitian Revolution of 1791–1803 and the disappearance of the world's biggest colonial producer; and even that sudden and serious imbalance was very soon redressed. But how remote this all seemed from the talk of gold and souls—the more familiar refrains of historians (particularly historians of the Hispanic achievement) recounting the saga of European expansion to the New World! Even the religious education of the enslaved Africans and indentured Europeans who came to the Caribbean with sugar cane and the other plantation crops (a far cry from Christianity and uplift for the Indians, the theme of Spanish imperial policy with which the conventional accounts were then filled) was of no interest to anyone.

I gave no serious thought to why the demand for sugar should have risen so rapidly and so continuously for so many centuries, or even to why sweetness might be a desirable taste. I suppose I thought the answers to such questions were self-evident—who doesn't like sweetness? Now it seems to me than my lack of curiosity was obtuse; I was taking demand for granted. And not just "demand" in the

abstract; world sugar production shows the most remarkable upward production curve of any major food on the world market over the course of several centuries, and it is continuing upward still. Only when I began to learn more Caribbean history and more about particular relationships between planters in the colonies and bankers, entrepreneurs, and different groups of consumers in the metropolises, did I begin to puzzle over what "demand" really was, to what extent it could be regarded as "natural," what is meant by words like "taste" and "preference" and even "good."

Soon after my fieldwork in Puerto Rico, I had a chance for a summer of study in Jamaica, where I lived in a small highland village that, having been established by the Baptist Missionary Society on the eve of emancipation as a home for newly freed church members, was still occupied—almost 125 years later—by the descendants of those freedmen. Though the agriculture in the highlands was mostly carried out on small landholdings and did not consist of plantation crops, we could look down from the lofty village heights on the verdant north coast and the brilliant green checkerboards of the cane plantations there. These, like the plantations on Puerto Rico's south coast, produced great quantities of cane for the eventual manufacture of granulated white sugar; here, too, the final refining was done elsewhere—in the metropolis, and not in the colony.

When I began to observe small-scale retailing in the busy market place of a nearby town, however, I saw for the first time a coarse, less refined sugar that harked back to earlier centuries, when haciendas along Puerto Rico's south coast, swallowed up after the invasion by giant North American corporations, had also once produced it. In the Brown's Town Market of St. Ann Parish, Jamaica, one or two mule-drawn wagons would arrive each market day carrying loads of hard brown sugar in "loaves," or "heads," produced in traditional fashion by sugar makers using ancient grinding and boiling equipment. Such sugar, which contained considerable quantities of molasses (and some impurities), was hardened in ceramic molds or cones from which the more liquid molasses was drained, leaving behind the dark-brown, crystalline loaf. It was consumed solely by poor, mostly rural Jamaicans. It is of course common to find that the poorest people in less developed societies

are in many regards the most "traditional." A product that the poor eat, both because they are accustomed to it and because they have no choice, will be praised by the rich, who will hardly ever eat it.

I encountered such sugar once more in Haiti, a few years later. Again, it was produced on small holdings, ground and processed by ancient machinery, and consumed by the poor. In Haiti, where nearly everyone is poor, nearly everyone ate this sort of sugar. The loaves in Haiti were shaped differently: rather like small logs, wrapped in banana leaf, and called in Creole *rapadou* (in Spanish, *raspadura*). Since that time, I have learned that such sugars exist throughout much of the rest of the world, including India, where they were probably first produced, perhaps as much as two thousand years ago.

There are great differences between families using ancient wooden machinery and iron cauldrons to boil up a quantity of sugar to sell to their neighbors in picturesque loaves, and the massed men and machinery employed in producing thousands of tons of sugar cane (and, eventually, of sugar) on modern plantations for export elsewhere. Such contrasts are an integral feature of Caribbean history. They occur not only between islands or between historical periods, but even within single societies (as in the case of Jamaica or Haiti) at the same time. The production of brown sugar in small quantities, remnant of an earlier technical and social era, though it is of declining economic importance will no doubt continue indefinitely, since it has cultural and sentimental meaning, probably for producers as well as consumers.[1] Caribbean sugar industries have changed with the times, and they represent, in their evolution from antecedent forms, interesting stages in the world history of modern society.

I have explained that my first fieldwork in Puerto Rico was in a village of cane workers. This was nearly my first experience outside the continental United States, and though I had been raised in the country, it was my first lengthy encounter with a community where nearly everyone made a living from the soil. These people were not farmers, for whom the production of agricultural commodities was a business; nor were they peasants, tillers of soil they owned or could treat as their own, as part of a distinctive way of life. They were agricultural laborers who owned neither land nor any pro-

ductive property, and who had to sell their labor to eat. They were wage earners who lived like factory workers, who worked in factories in the field, and just about everything they needed and used they bought from stores. Nearly all of it came from somewhere else: cloth and clothing, shoes, writing pads, rice, olive oil, building materials, medicine. Almost without exception, what they consumed someone else had produced.

The chemical and mechanical transformations by which substances are bent to human use and become unrecognizable to those who know them in nature have marked our relationship to nature for almost as long as we have been human. Indeed, some would say that it is those very transformations that define our humanity. But the division of labor by which such transformations are realized can impart additional mystery to the technical processes. When the locus of manufacture and that of use are separated in time and space, when the makers and the users are as little known to each other as are the processes of manufacture and use themselves, the mystery will deepen. An anecdote may make the point.

My beloved companion and teacher in the field, the late Charles Rosario, received his preparatory education in the United States. When his fellow students learned that he came from Puerto Rico, they immediately assumed that his father (who was a sociologist at the University of Puerto Rico) was a *hacendado*—that is, a wealthy owner of endless acres of tropical land. They asked Charlie to bring them some distinctive souvenir of plantation life when he returned from the island at the summer's end; what they would relish most, they said, was a machete. Eager to please his new friends, Charlie told me, he examined countless machetes in the island stores. But he was dismayed to discover that they were all manufactured in Connecticut—indeed, at a factory only a few hours' drive from the New England school he and his friends were attending.

As I became more and more interested in the history of the Caribbean region and its products, I began to learn about the plantations that were its most distinctive and characteristic economic form. Such plantations were first created in the New World during the early years of the sixteenth century and were staffed for the most part with enslaved Africans. Much changed, they were still there when I first went to Puerto Rico, thirty years ago; so were

the descendants of those slaves and, as I later learned and saw elsewhere, the descendants of Portuguese, Javanese, Chinese, and Indian contract laborers, and many other varieties of human being whose ancestors has been brought to the region to grow, cut, and grind sugar cane.

I began to join this information to my modest knowledge of Europe itself. Why Europe? Because these island plantations had been the invention of Europe, overseas experiments of Europe, many of them successful (as far as the Europeans were concerned); and the history of European societies had in certain ways paralleled that of the plantation. One could look around and see sugar-cane plantations and coffee, cacao, and tobacco haciendas, and so, too, one could imagine those Europeans who had thought it promising to create them, to invest in their creation, and to import vast numbers of people in chains from elsewhere to work them. These last would be, if not slaves, then men who sold their labor because they had nothing else to sell; who would probably produce things of which they were not the principal consumers; who would consume things they had not produced, and in the process earn profit for others elsewhere.

It seemed to me that the mysteriousness that accompanied my seeing, at one and the same time, cane growing in the fields and white sugar in my cup, should also accompany the sight of molten metal or, better, raw iron ore, on the one hand, and a perfectly wrought pair of manacles or leg irons, on the other. The mystery was not simply one of technical transformation, impressive as that is, but also the mystery of people unknown to one another being linked through space and time—and not just by politics and economics, but along a particular chain of connection maintained by their production.

The tropical substances whose production I observed in Puerto Rico were foods of a curious kind. Most are stimulants; some are intoxicating; tobacco tends to suppress hunger, whereas sugar provides calories in unusually digestible form but not much else. Of all of these substances, sugar has always been the most important. It is the epitome of a historical process at least as old as Europe's thrustings outside itself in search of new worlds. I hope to explain what sugar reveals about a wider world, entailing as it does a lengthy

history of changing relationships among peoples, societies, and substances.

The study of sugar goes back very far in history, even in European history.[2] Yet much about it remains obscure, even enigmatic. How and why sugar has risen to such prevailing importance among European peoples to whom it had at one time been hardly known is still not altogether clear. A single source of satisfaction—sucrose extracted from the sugar cane—for what appears to be a widespread, perhaps even universal, human liking for sweetness became established in European taste preferences at a time when European power, military might, and economic initiative were transforming the world. That source linked Europe and many colonial areas from the fifteenth century onward, the passage of centuries only underlining its importance even while politics changed. And, conversely, what the metropolises produced the colonies consumed. The desire for sweet substances spread and increased steadily; many different products were employed to satisfy it, and cane sugar's importance therefore varied from time to time.

Since sugar seems to satisfy a particular desire (it also seems, in so doing, to awaken that desire yet anew), one needs to understand just what makes demand work: how and why it increases under what conditions. One cannot simply assume that everyone has an infinite desire for sweetness, any more than one can assume the same about a desire for comfort or wealth or power. In order to examine these questions in a specific historical context, I will look at the history of sugar consumption in Great Britain especially between 1650, when sugar began to be fairly common, and 1900, by which time it had entered firmly into the diet of every working family. But this will require some prior examination of the production of the sugar that ended up on English tables in the tea, the jam, the biscuits and cakes and sweets. Because we do not know precisely how sugar was introduced to large segments of Britain's national population—at what rates, by what means, or under exactly what conditions—some speculation is unavoidable. But it is nevertheless possible to show how some people and groups unfamiliar with sugar (and other newly imported ingestibles) gradually became users of it—even, quite rapidly, daily users. Indeed, there is much evidence that many consumers, over time, would have gladly

eaten more sugar had they been able to get it, while those who were already consuming it regularly were prepared only reluctantly to reduce or forgo its use. Because anthropology is concerned with how people stubbornly maintain past practices, even when under strong negative pressures, but repudiate other behaviors quite readily in order to act differently, these materials throw light upon the historical circumstances from a perspective rather different from the historian's. Though I cannot answer many questions that historians might bring to these data, I shall suggest that anthropologists ask (and try to answer) certain other questions.

Cultural or social anthropology has built its reputation as a discipline upon the study of non-Western peoples; of peoples who form numerically small societies; of peoples who do not practice any of the so-called great religions; of peoples whose technical repertories are modest—in short, upon the study of what are labeled "primitive" societies. Now, the fact that most of us anthropologists have *not* made such studies has not weakened the general belief that anthropology's strength as a discipline comes from knowing about societies the behaviors of whose members are sufficiently different from our own, yet are based on sufficiently similar principles, to allow us to document the marvelous variability of human custom while vouchsafing the unshakable, essential oneness of the species. This belief has a great deal to recommend it. It is, anyway, my own view. Yet it has unfortunately led anthropologists in the past to bypass willfully any society that appeared in one regard or another not to qualify as "primitive"—or even, occasionally, to ignore information that made it clear that the society being studied was not quite so primitive (or isolated) as the anthropologist would like. The latter is not an outright suppression of data so much as an incapacity or unwillingness to take such data into account theoretically. It is easy to be critical of one's predecessors. But how can one refrain from counterposing Malinowski's studied instructions about learning the natives' point of view by avoiding other Europeans in the field,[3] with his rather casual observation that the same natives had learned to play cricket in the mission schools years before he began his fieldwork? True, Malinowski never *denied* the presence of other Europeans, or of European influence—indeed, he eventually reproached himself for too studiedly ignoring the Eu-

ropean presence, and called this his most serious deficiency. But in much of his work, the West in all its guises was played down or even ignored, leaving behind an allegedly pristine primitivity, coolly observed by the anthropologist-as-hero. This curious contrast—unspoiled aborigines on the one hand, hymn-singing mission children on the other—is not an isolated one. By some strange sleight of hand, one anthropological monograph after another whisks out of view any signs of the present and how it came to be. This vanishing act imposes burdens on those who feel the need to perform it; those of us who do not ought to have been thinking much more soberly about what anthropologists should study.

Many of anthropology's most distinguished contemporary practitioners have turned their attention to so-called modern or western societies, but they and the rest of us seem to want to maintain the illusion of what one of my colleagues has aptly dubbed "the uncontaminated McCoy." Even those of us who have studied nonprimitive societies seem eager to perpetuate the idea that the profession's strength flows from our mastery of the primitive, more than from the study of change, or of becoming "modern." Accordingly, the movement toward an anthropology of modern life has been somewhat halting, and it has tried to justify itself by concentrating on marginal or unusual enclaves in modern societies: ethnic clusters, exotic occupations, criminal elements, the "underlife," etc. This surely has its positive side. Yet the uncomfortable inference is that such groups most closely approximate the anthropological notion of the primitive.

In the present instance, the prosaic quality of the subject matter is inescapable; what could be less "anthropological" than the historical examination of a food that graces every modern table? And yet the anthropology of just such homely, everyday substances may help us to clarify both how the world changes from what it was to what it may become, and how it manages at the same time to stay in certain regards very much the same.

Let us suppose that there is some value in trying to shape an anthropology of the present, and that to do so we must study societies that lack the features conventionally associated with the so-called primitive. We must still take into account the institutions anthropologists cherish—kinship, family, marriage, *rites de pas-*

sage—and puzzle out the basic divisions by which people are assorted and grouped. We would still try to find out more about fewer people than less about more people. We would still, I believe, put credence in fieldwork, and would value what informants say, as well as what they aspire to and what they do. This would, of course, have to be a different anthropology. As the archaeologist Robert Adams has suggested, anthropologists will no longer be able to invoke scientific "objectivity" to protect themselves from the political implications of their findings, if their subjects turn out simply to be fellow citizens who are poorer or less influential than they.[4] And this new anthropology does not yet wholly exist. The present book, mainly historical in nature, aspires to take a step in its direction. My contention is that the social history of the use of new foods in a western nation can contribute to an anthropology of modern life. It would, of course, be immensely satisfying to be able to declare that my brooding about sugar for thirty years has resulted in some clear-cut alignment, the solution to a puzzle, the resolution of some contradiction, perhaps even a discovery. But I remain uncertain. This book has tended to write itself; I have watched the process, hoping it would reveal something I did not already know.

The organization of the volume is simple. In chapter 1, I attempt to open the subject of the anthropology of food and eating, as part of an anthropology of modern life. This leads me to a discussion of sweetness, as opposed to sweet substances. Sweetness is a taste—what Hobbes called a "Quality"—and the sugars, sucrose (which is won principally from the cane and the sugar beet) among them, are substances that excite the sensation of sweetness. Since any normal human being can apparently experience sweetness, and since all the societies we know of recognize it, something about sweetness must be linked to our character as a species. Yet the liking for sweet things is of highly variable intensity. Hence, an explanation of why some peoples eat lots of sweet things and others hardly any cannot rely on the idea of the species-wide characteristic. How, then, does a particular people become firmly habituated to a large, regular, and dependable supply of sweetness?

Whereas fruit and honey were major sources of sweetness for the English people before about 1650, they do not seem to have figured

significantly in the English diet. Sugar made from the juice of the cane had reached England in small quantities by about 1100 A.D.; during the next five centuries, the amounts of cane sugar available doubtless increased, slowly and irregularly. In chapter 2, I look at the production of sugar as the West began to consume more and more of it. From 1650 onward, sugar began to change from a luxury and a rarity into a commonplace and a necessity in many nations, England among them; with a few significant exceptions, this increased consumption after 1650 accompanied the "development" of the West. It was, I believe, the second (or possibly the first, if one discounts tobacco) so-called luxury transformed in this fashion, epitomizing the productive thrust and emerging intent of world capitalism, which centered at first upon the Netherlands and England. I therefore also focus on the possessions that supplied the United Kingdom with sugar, molasses, and rum: on their system of plantation production, and the forms of labor exaction by which such products were made available. I hope to show the special significance of a colonial product like sugar in the growth of world capitalism.

Thereafter, in chapter 3, I discuss the consumption of sugar. My aim is, first, to show how production and consumption were so closely bound together that each may be said partly to have determined the other, and, second, to show that consumption must be explained in terms of what people did and thought: sugar penetrated social behavior and, in being put to new uses and taking on new meanings, was transformed from curiosity and luxury into commonplace and necessity. The relationship between production and consumption may even be paralleled by the relationship between use and meaning. I don't think meanings inhere in substances naturally or inevitably. Rather, I believe that meaning arises out of use, as people use substances in social relationships.

Outside forces often determine what is available to be endowed with meaning. If the users themselves do not so much determine what is available to be used as add meanings to what is available, what does that say about meaning? At what point does the prerogative to bestow meaning move from the consumers to the sellers? Or could it be that the power to bestow meaning always accompanies the power to determine availabilities? What do such ques-

tions—and their answers—mean for our understanding of the operation of modern society, and for our understanding of freedom and individualism?

In chapter 4, I try to say something about why things happened as they did, and I attempt some treatment of circumstance, conjuncture, and cause. Finally, in chapter 5, I offer a few suggestions about where sugar, and the study of sugar in modern society, may be going. I have suggested that anthropology is showing some uncertainty about its own future. An anthropology of modern life and of food and eating, for example, cannot ignore fieldwork or do without it. My hope is that I have identified problems of significance concerning which fieldwork might eventually yield results useful for both theory and policy.

My bias in a historical direction will be apparent. Though I do not accept uncritically the dictum that anthropology must become history or be nothing at all, I believe that without history its explanatory power is seriously compromised. Social phenomena are by their nature historical, which is to say that the relationships among events in one "moment" can never be abstracted from their past and future setting. Arguments about immanent human nature, about the human being's inbuilt capacity to endow the world with its characteristic structures, are not necessarily wrong; but when these arguments replace or obviate history, they are inadequate and misleading. Human beings do create social structures, and do endow events with meaning; but these structures and meanings have historical origins that shape, limit, and help to explain such creativity.