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(T)racing the Language of Labor: The Early West Indian Plantation

This document serves as an incomplete panel proposal for the upcoming OIEAHC conference, “Translation and Transmission in the Early Americas.”

In Richard Ligon’s *A True and Exact History of Barbados* (1657), the author goes into great detail about the best managerial practices of the “ingenio,” or the West Indian plantation, and the enslaved subjects that work it. Gaining both lexicon and the structural schematics of the plantation work site from the Dutch, Spanish and Portuguese, the fledgling British Barbadian colony was establishing its own architectural discourse of labor and imperialization. The epistemological formation of subject and empire can be traced through not only consumable goods (sugar, coffee, etc.) of the West Indian colonies, but also the lexical appropriation and transmission of ideas and policies that were imbibed and digested along with these goods in both the metropole and colonial peripheries. English lexical borrowing of the words “ingenio,” “factory,” and “negroes,” in addition to many others, allow the formation of an imperial discourse that helped cement the signifiers of labor and racial politics of the early West Indian plantation from the seventeenth to the nineteenth centuries. This panel will seek to explore contemporary scholarship on the entangled exchange of labor politics and language of the early plantation site in not only the British Caribbean, but throughout the trans-imperial Atlantic. Interlingual translation, transmission, and linguistic exchanges of the language of labor and commercial mercantilism on the plantation site allow for a new avenue of discussion about signification, subjectivity, and the construction of racialized labor politics of the early Caribbean.