

Monday, 10.11.2025; 4:15 - 5:45 pm CET

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Slaves, Apprentices, and Indentured Labour. Strong Asymmetrical Dependency within the British and Dutch Caribbean (1833-1873)

Abstract:

Even before the slave trade and slavery became established in the transatlantic regions, early colonialism relied on the use of European contract workers. Not until the nineteenth century was there a return to the contract labour system as a result of the capitalization of the flow of goods after the long Coalition Wars (1793-1815), which were accompanied by the abolition of the transatlantic slave trade by the United Kingdom in 1807/08. Industrial Britain had lost its markets in North America by 1783, and tried to compensate for this by opening up new markets in Latin America, for which it needed a population with purchasing power. The idea of replacing the wageless slave society with wage slavery took hold in the 1820s and 1830s.

After tough negotiations with the slave owners, the apprenticeship system came into being in the British colonies in 1834, marking the peak of strong asymmetrical dependency. Although the apprenticeship system collapsed in 1838 due to the resistance of the apprentices (which did not prevent the Dutch from introducing it in their colonies in 1863), it served as a model for the Indentured Labour System that the British subsequently established in their colonies. Between 1833 and 1873, hundreds of thousands of Asian, African and European contract labourers were brought to the Caribbean plantation system, where they continued the work as wage slaves.

This Joseph C. Miller Memorial Lecture will trace the brutality of how markets developed brand development in the context of asymmetrical dependencies at both the Atlantic and global levels in the mid-nineteenth century, focusing on micro-historical examples from Trinidad and Tobago, Guyana and Curaçao.

Bio:

Since 1999, Professor Christian Cwik has led over 66 applied history projects with more than eight hundred participants in Latin America, West Africa and Western Europe. From 2000 to 2025, Cwik has held professorships at various universities in Latin America and the Caribbean (Venezuela, Colombia, Cuba, Trinidad and Tobago, Uruguay) and Europe (Seville, Cologne, Erfurt, Dresden, Vienna and Graz). He has also lectured at Harvard, Yale, Wellesley, Johns Hopkins and Tulane Universities in New Orleans as well as at the UNAM in Mexico City. Christian Cwik is an expert on the history of Jews in the Americas, German colonialism in the Americas and European migration to the Americas, as well as on the history of resistance in the Atlantic world.