

Hollander, Gail M.: *Raising Cane in the 'Glades'. The Global Sugar Trade and the Transformation of Florida*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press 2008. ISBN: 978-0-2263-4950-3; 336 S.

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In this twentieth-century history of the transformation of the Florida Everglades from an incredibly diverse wetlands to a politically managed site of agro-industrial sugar production, geographer Gail Hollander explores the intersection between international food trade, the discursive construction of geographic regions, and the growing scale of state-capitalist environmental engineering. Hollander intervenes in food-systems theory, which tends to focus on commodity chains and networks, by demonstrating that as agricultural commodity production expanded, the fixed sites of production themselves underwent changes as profound and dynamic as did the traveling patterns of the commodities.¹ Hollander establishes this theoretical orientation in her introduction and it informs the questions she asks and insights she obtains. Her subsequent historical narrative, however, is unburdened by difficult concepts. The reader seeking a full theoretical synthesis will be somewhat disappointed.

From the seventeenth to the twentieth century, sugar played a starring role among commodities in the globalizing commodity market. Hollander argues that „the sugar question“ was debated in the early twentieth century as a proxy for international trade as a whole. Gleaning details from booster propaganda, Congressional testimony, and other U.S. government documents, Hollander reconstructs the struggles between U.S. sugar capitalists invested domestically and those invested elsewhere in the Americas – especially Cuba – over the bounties, tariffs, quotas and other protection schemes of U.S. sugar policy. There were persistent conflicts between do-

mestic priorities, jealously protected by members of Congress, and the foreign policy priorities of U.S. Presidents who sought to give favorable treatment to Caribbean and Latin American allies. By the late twentieth century, sugar remained an important, but no longer dominant, part of new trade debates that moved away from national protectionism in favor of regional and global regimes enforced by institutions like the World Trade Organization.

Regionalism was a weapon that competing agro-capitalists could wield against each other in the search for favorable treatment from the state. The Everglades were first discursively imagined and then physically remade as industrial sugar plantations at a time of surplus in the commodity. The construction of an industrial Everglades was primarily justified by moral and national discourses, rather than by economic efficiency. Supplementing her text with clear and informative maps, Hollander describes how Florida agricultural boosters discursively created the idea of Florida as a valuable and unique piece of the tropics within the borders of the United States, lauded its national American identity above Cuba's foreignness, and portrayed domestic sugar production as important to national security. The U.S. Sugar Act of 1934 made sugar particularly ripe for Hollander's regional analysis since it established a quota system according to region. Competing sugar interests in Cuba and elsewhere made their own moral claims to quotas based on their support for U.S. foreign policy and, during the Cold War, efforts to suppress Communism. It was only after the 1959 Cuban Revolution eliminated the moral claims and quotas of Cuba that Florida sugar production exploded. Hollander's history suggests, though she does not emphasize it, that Florida sugar interests, now merged with Cuban exiles, played a central role in extending the embargo against Cuba, their feared competitor.

Through such regional constructions and by other means, the state was mobilized to transform land and markets in a way favorable to private profit. In interesting ways, *Raising Cane* can be read as a history of state-building in Florida, of taking control of a region seen as untamed wilderness at a time

¹ Hollander particularly draws on the work of Harriet Friedmann and Sidney Mintz: Harriet Friedmann, *The Political Economy of Food. The Rise and Fall of the Post-war International Food Order*, in: *Supplement to American Journal of Sociology* 88 (1982), pp. 248-86., Sidney W. Mintz, *Sweetness and Power. The Place of Sugar in Modern History*, New York 1985.

when similar federal projects were launched around the country. After fits and starts, by mid-century, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers undertook and maintained a drainage and water control project on the scale of the Panama Canal to transform a diverse landscape into one specialized for the production of a sole commodity. Government scientists studied water control problems and developed cane seed appropriate to the Everglades ecosystem. By so doing, they politicized „the natural dynamic between landscape and water.“ (p. 149) Even the environmentalists that emerged in the 1950s and grew stronger in the 1980s, as Hollander discusses in some detail, were part of this state project, seeking control over an environment they saw as chaotic. From the very beginning of this phase of Everglades history, the state subsidized sugar markets, beginning with an 1890 bounty that inspired the first major investor. The state intervened more directly to ensure a consumption market for sugar producers after the 1934 Sugar Act in the context of the New Deal. The state even managed sugar producers' labor force by helping recruit, transport and lodge largely African-American migrant workers. Initial paternalism morphed into government padronism as the U.S. imported temporary workers from the Caribbean from World War II until 1995, when mechanization made so many field hands unnecessary.

The alliance between governments and growers was not always strong or smooth, and Hollander adeptly pulls apart the nuances and changes over time. Against the wishes of the industry, the government rationed sugar during World War II and warned against overconsumption of sugar later in the century. Big and small growers' strategic alliances were similarly complex, as in the 1940s, when much sugar booster discourse favored small companies against possible monopolies.

Hollander's work is tightly focused on the transformations of Florida due to elite discourse and elite economic activity, and she does much with the governmental and corporate sources on which she draws. It is up to other scholars to test one of her central assumptions: that a hegemonic elite determined the ultimate shape of the Everglades. Hol-

lander's sources obscure other actors – with their own discursive strategies and goals for the region – including Seminole Indians, long-resident whites, and small-scale farmers attracted from Midwestern and Northern cities by land sales companies from the 1920s to the 1940s. Those latter farmers were not an insignificant group. Hollander says 20,000 people bought land from companies selling Everglades real estate. While „Florida officials 'saw' a blank slate on which to construct a highly capitalized, centralized, industrial plantation system“ (p. 60), these earlier residents could have pointed out the fiction on which this was based and challenged their own displacement. On the other hand, they may have welcomed rescue from a difficult farming situation in the muck. So, while she captures the national and global debate beautifully, this book has no insight into conflicts within Florida over what the region would become. The major exception are workers, whose resistance she reveals at key moments, particularly once the UFWU began challenging the temporary worker program in the 1970s.

Despite such limitations imposed by selection of topic, this book should be of interest to several groups of scholars, as it bridges gaps between international relations, the theory of geographic regions, and the analysis of food commodity production.

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