
Caribbean Contours is a volume of essays by noted Caribbeanists. It attempts to provide a broad yet scholarly introduction to the region for general readers. Refreshingly, it has nothing in common with the run-of-the-mill studies which emphasize U.S. geostrategic interests and which tend to reduce West Indians to the role of helpless pawns in the regional power struggle. Certainly the Caribbean specialist is unlikely to learn anything very new from this book (except perhaps from the essays by Alleyne and Bilby), but the contributors, who know the region well and are generally leading scholars in their field, succeed in surveying diverse aspects of Caribbean life with sensitivity, erudition, and a proper respect for the complexity of their subject. Most of the essays range easily and confidently across the linguistic/cultural barriers which divide the region; this book is truly pan-Caribbean in scope and approach.

The choice of topics for inclusion is original: it is good to see, in a general introductory work, two essays on Caribbean languages (Alleyne) and music (Bilby). Indeed, for me, these were the most interesting contributions. Alleyne provides a brief, yet incisive, survey of current linguistic thinking on the region's language spectrum: it is an excellent introduction to the subject for the lay reader. Bilby brings together a great deal of data from all over the Caribbean to support his argument that there is an African-European musical continuum analogous to the linguistic continuum described by Alleyne.

Leading scholars Sidney Mintz, H. Hoetink, and Gordon Lewis contribute perceptive "think-pieces" which reflect much of their learning about and sensitivity to the Caribbean, while the essays by Carl Stone and G. B. Hagelberg are somewhat more factual in approach. All in all, an interesting diversity in topic, style, and approach makes Caribbean Contours a welcome introduction to the region for a nonspecialist readership.

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Bridget Brereton


Paget Henry examines the impact of various phases of capitalism—mercantilism, liberal capitalism, and monopoly capitalism—on the economy and society of the island of Antigua, first colonized by the British in the seventeenth century. He rests his discussion of Antigua as a peripheral capitalist colony and state on the