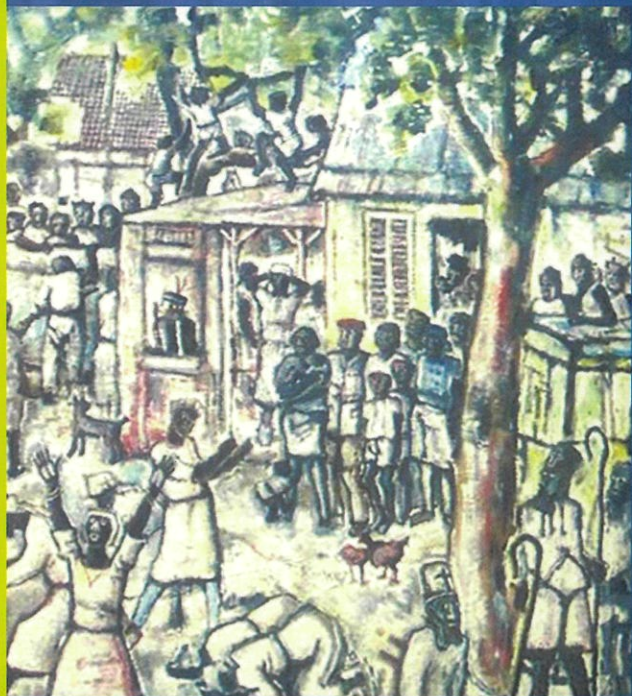


Freedoms Won

Caribbean Emancipations, Ethnicities and Nationhood

Hilary McD. Beckles
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CAMBRIDGE

Freedom's Won

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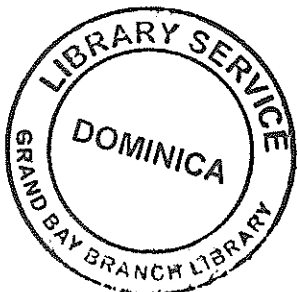
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Dedication

This book is dedicated to Norma Joy Lazarus (d. 1982)

and to

the people of the former British-colonised Caribbean on the occasion of the
bicentenary of the final abolition of the trans-Atlantic trade in Africans
(1807–2007)



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Multinational corporations were established in these territories, and they sent back large sums of money to the US. Examples of these corporations are the Bauxite companies of ALCOA and REYNOLDS in Jamaica, the oil company TEXACO in Trinidad and Tobago as well as in Jamaica, and the KAISER bauxite company in Guyana. The United Fruit Company and Chase Manhattan were also present. The US has also invested in the tourist industry, with US-owned hotels and casinos in many islands, but especially in The Bahamas.

Cold War actions in Commonwealth Caribbean politics

The US also continues to play a vigilant role in Commonwealth Caribbean politics. During the Cold War it claimed to be concerned about the spread of Cuban and Soviet style communism in its 'backyard', especially in light of the political turmoil in colonial Guyana and the suspension of the constitution there in 1953. The US used economic aid (for example through the 1961 Alliance for Progress) and the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) formed in 1947, to combat communism overseas.

The USA supported Britain's Prime Minister Winston Churchill's removal of Cheddi Jagan from office in colonial Guyana, and they supported the expansion of the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions (ICFTU) in the region to counter the influence of the Moscow-aligned World Federation of Trade Unions. Major Jamaican trade unions, the Bustamante Industrial Trade Union (BITU) and the National Workers Union (NWU) became members of the ICFTU. This showed their anti-communist stance. Norman Manley's People's National Party even expelled prominent left-wing members (e.g. Richard Hart and Ken Hill) from the Party. US Senator Joe McCarthy personified this outright anti-communist attitude. He was known for seeking out those suspected of communist and 'unAmerican' activities. Anti-communism anxieties affected the Commonwealth Caribbean as it did Latin America.

The US sponsored the formation of, and has since dominated, the Organisation of American States (OAS) to which independent Caribbean states have membership. The OAS replaced the old Pan-American Union and was intended to strengthen inter-American cooperation. The OAS issued the Caracas Declaration in 1954, which was little more than a modification of the Monroe Doctrine. The US prodded the OAS to adopt resolutions declaring that the presence of Marxism-Leninism and alien ideology in the Americas was tantamount to 'foreign aggression'. They reserved the right to act by themselves, if necessary, to protect the hemisphere from such aggression. This meant suppressing any radical left-wing challenges.

In the post-war years, the normal US intervention strategy was not to send in marines, but to use counter-insurgency and other security assistance programmes to ensure that local security bodies had the capacity to handle any situation. The exception was the case of Grenada in 1983 (see below). According to one analyst the CIA was used as the instrument of intervention, where stronger and more direct action was not needed.

Jamaica

The US often acted unilaterally in situations that demanded collective action by the region. This approach encouraged anti-US feelings in the Commonwealth Caribbean, especially among nationalist politicians and intellectuals. Some of these people, like Michael Manley, tried to take their countries along alternative paths to the capitalist model of free-market development. Not surprisingly, it was widely suspected that the CIA sought to destabilise the Manley regime. Manley's anti-imperial attitude and economic and social reforms made him popular among the masses and radical intellectuals. But these attitudes alienated the USA and fuelled the anti-communism of the opposition Jamaica Labour Party (JLP) under Edward Seaga. The 1970s was a politically volatile and violent period in Jamaica. The USA issued a travel advisory, warning US tourists not to visit Jamaica. They also tried to impose economic sanctions on the island. Manley sought aid from the IMF in 1977. In the traditional model of 'aid as imperialism', the IMF imposed a series of conditions in exchange for aid. The Manley regime could not meet these conditions and this led to further economic crises and social tension in the island. The JLP took full advantage of this atmosphere and won the 1980 general elections. The USA was clearly relieved and openly supported the Seaga regime. Seaga and Reagan visited each other's countries in 1981 and 1983 respectively.

Grenada

In March 1979, the socialist Maurice Bishop, the popular charismatic leader of the New Jewel Movement (NJM), staged a revolutionary coup against the increasingly unpopular Eric Gairy (see Chapter 17). International institutions like the World Bank and the IMF had given hesitant support to Bishop's economic reforms, in particular his mixed economy model, but Ronald Reagan's regime was suspicious about Bishop's close relations with Cuba. In this period of the Cold War the US continued to be concerned about the communist influence in the region and the leftist leanings of some regimes. It therefore viewed Grenada as a potential security threat, especially after Cuban construction workers and engineers arrived there to help build an international airport. The view of the

The abolition of slavery and the withdrawal of most labourers to other occupations in commercial St Thomas or to non-agricultural labour in the towns of St Croix and St John just made the situation worse for employers and the Danish government. Finally, there were few firm social and cultural links between Denmark and its Caribbean possessions. The English language was the one most widely used in the islands; there was no widespread use of the Danish currency; and the educational system was heavily influenced by the British system. In the islands themselves, the majority of the population believed that they would get more economic and social benefits if they ended their Danish status.

There is some difference in opinion as to whether the US purchase of the Danish Caribbean territories was motivated by economic or military considerations. Even though the islands may not have been economically viable at the time of the purchase, they certainly had economic potential and would help the US to safeguard the approaches to other more profitable territories like the Panama Canal. Therefore, it could be said that both economic and strategic or military considerations were important.

The US had a long commercial association with the Danish-colonised Caribbean. By the 19th Century, trade with the US accounted for one-third of the imports of the islands. They would also help the trading partners of the US as a place for recreation and transport refuelling. The US itself could use the islands as lookout points during wars with other nations as the islands were well located for that purpose. Finally, there was a growing expansionist stance in the US in the early 20th Century. Under the purchase agreement the US would not take private property. Those who wished to remain as Danish citizens could do so. Others were to become US citizens (although this was not effected until years later). Civil rights and political status were to be decided by the US Congress.

The US embarked on a programme of road construction, construction of schools, improvement of social services, water supply, sewage, police and fire services. Not much was done to expand agriculture, though, and by the 1950s tourism had become the main economic activity.

11 The USA in the Commonwealth Caribbean

The US did not confine its military activities to the former Danish and Spanish colonies. In 1940, during World War II, it leased and established military bases in British-colonised territories. Before this date the USA had been a

neutral power in the war. Now it said that Germany wanted to occupy British-colonised territories and that if the US remained a neutral power, it could not do anything to stop Germany. Germany was in fact interrupting British and Allied shipping in the region. The USA abandoned its neutral position in 1940 when Franklin Roosevelt negotiated the erection of these bases with Britain. The agreement was that the US would supply Britain with 50 destroyers in exchange for the right to establish bases in Trinidad (built at Chaguaramas), Jamaica, Bermuda, Antigua, colonial Guyana and St Lucia on a 99-year rent-free lease. The US reserved the right to build immediately or later. Bases or marine garrisons already existed in Cuba (Guantanamo Bay) Puerto Rico, Honduras, Haiti, the Dominican Republic and the USVI. In 1942 German submarines sank ships in the Caribbean, including one near Barbados and St Lucia.

Military bases (e.g. in Trinidad)

The USA had long had economic interests in the British-colonised Caribbean, but now it also had military interests. The establishment of US bases had social and economic consequences for the islands. In Trinidad, people complained that the development of Port-of-Spain was limited because so much land was released for the base and its environs. Port of Spain lost some popular beach spots. Still, many local people got jobs on the bases, especially in construction. The entertainment industry, especially calypso, grew tremendously. Some people married US nationals working at the base. The economy benefited from the inflow of US dollars. Prostitution increased around the areas near the base.

After the war, the USA gave back many of these bases to Britain. In the case of Trinidad, the people demanded the base back, as it was seen as the site of the Federal capital. The closure of the bases also caused social disruption as they had created economic opportunities for the country as a whole. But many people felt that it was more important for the country to have back control of its own land.

Post-World War II economic influence

After the war there was still evidence of US cultural and economic influences in these territories. Indeed, in the post-war years the British-colonised Caribbean territories were even more linked economically to the US than to the United Kingdom. Major US cities, rather than London, became the preferred destination of many emigrants. More and more the US became involved in the economic affairs of the independent and British-colonised Caribbean through the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank. Jamaica and other Commonwealth Caribbean territories imported most of their supplies from the US.

Americans was that these were more than construction workers. So relations between Bishop's People's Revolutionary Government and the Reagan administration became increasingly tense, with Bishop accusing the US of bullying and destabilising tactics.

The specific moment of the US military action in Grenada was created by the NJM itself. A fierce power struggle broke out between the NJM members over the direction and leadership of the revolution. An extremist Marxist faction led by Bernard Coard demanded a system of joint leadership. When Prime Minister Bishop refused to accept this alternative model he was put under house arrest by a faction of the island's armed forces which supported Coard. Popular protest resulted as Bishop's supporters demonstrated and successfully freed him. However, his refuge at Fort Rupert was attacked by the pro-Coard military and Bishop and several of his NJM leaders were killed.

US warships soon arrived in Grenada with 6,000 troops, allegedly to 'protect US citizens' and restore order. Several Caribbean leaders, including Dominican Prime Minister



Fig 13.15 Maurice Bishop

Eugenia Charles and Tom Adams of Barbados, supported the US action. Even within Grenada some pro-Bishop supporters also welcomed the US presence and condemned the Coard group. In the fighting that followed, many US and Grenadian lives were lost. The Cuban construction workers were also fired on and fought back.

The US was determined to weaken Cuban/communist influences in the region and to promote regimes based on free-market and export-led development. During the rest of the 1980s, the US used its economic power, via financial aid to the Eastern Caribbean, to assert its influence in the region. By the end of 1983, for example, Grenada had become one of the highest per capita recipients of US funding despite the fact that high wages made it a less attractive place for US investment when compared to Haiti, Mexico and the Dominican Republic.

What is the situation now?

With the collapse of the Soviet Union, the US is no longer on military alert in the Commonwealth Caribbean, but maintains diplomatic relations and embassies in several territories. The low-key interest in the region was clearly expressed by Madeline Albright (the US Secretary of State in the Bill Clinton administration) in a lecture at the Johns Hopkins University on 18 January 2000. While the lecture was titled 'US foreign policy in 2000', hardly any attention was paid to the former British colonies; but there was a significant focus on Colombia because of the US preoccupation with the production of and illegal trade in drugs.

The closeness of the Caribbean to the US mainland raises a number of security and strategic issues which remain highly important. US fears are no longer linked to communist infiltration, European super power rivalry and imperial interest. The new concerns are about illegal migration, terrorism and drug-related crimes. The US continues to provide financial aid to the region to help fight drug trafficking, with a specific focus on Colombia. It is a worrying factor that the US government does not have the ability to curb the demand for drugs at home – it is partly this demand which fuels the supply from Central America and the Caribbean.

The Caribbean Basin Initiative of 1983 and other US-sponsored finance and trade programmes are aimed at getting the US private sector to invest in the region as a way of creating jobs and stemming the tide of emigration. However, these schemes have had little effect on emigration. Although they intended to create jobs, they have also created cheap labour, especially of female workers who work long hours for low pay. The US still remains the preferred destination for thousands of Caribbean migrants. However, in the aftermath of the

terrorist attacks in the US on 11 September 2001, immigration to the US has become more difficult for Caribbean people.

The continuing US cultural influence

The US cultural influence in the Commonwealth Caribbean is strong and widespread. This cultural influence has had a long history. By the early 1900s the mass media had penetrated the region, spreading American culture through radio, cinema and newspapers. Later the television became a powerful means of transmitting US culture. By the 1960s, the media had succeeded in transmitting many aspects of US culture to the region, especially in the areas of sports, technology, language, dress, music, film, news, food and education. Since the 1980s, the widespread availability of Cable TV has brought US culture even closer to millions of people in the Caribbean. Local TV stations transmit more US than local programmes and many now speak of the 'CNNisation' of the region.

The presence of Caribbeans in the US has also contributed to the expansion of the US cultural influence, with relatives sending/taking back US products (clothes, electronic items, etc.) in the now familiar barrels. In the area of sports, the popularity of the US influenced basketball (along with the sports stars like Michael Jordan), is now quite marked. Many in the region say this is why young people are less interested in cricket, considered the cornerstone of Caribbean sports. Americanisms have crept into the languages of the region, and the American influence is evident in jazz, disco, funk, rock and roll, and the blues. The US currency is commonly used in all Caribbean territories, and US fast food chains are familiar sites: McDonalds, Burger King, Popeye, Pizza Hut.

While the method of delivering primary and secondary education is still very much grounded in the British culture, tertiary education has shown greater signs of US influence, for example, in the adoption of the two-semester system. Many students choose to study in US colleges and universities qualifying themselves locally for the vital SAT, GRE and GMAT.

We will see in the next chapter that US cultural influence has not meant the loss of Caribbean tradition. Indeed, the Caribbean has also exported its culture to the US. Sections of the US population have embraced soca, reggae, DJ and dancehall music, calypso, steelband, carnival, Jamaican nation language and Caribbean dishes. While the attraction for many North American tourists continues to be sun, sea and sand, for others, the pull of Caribbean culture is unmistakable. Finally, there are those in the region who, in response to the 'cultural penetration' from the US and Europe, have made a more

serious effort to promote Caribbean culture, especially African-Caribbean and Indo-Caribbean culture. Cultural nationalists from all classes are in the forefront of this movement to reclaim Caribbean culture, and include poets, singers and musicians, artists, academics and writers.

To sum up

US military intervention in the affairs of the Caribbean region has produced changes in governance, either through its support of governments or through economic policies which, in some cases, impoverished regimes that see their interests and those of the USA as not one and the same. The results of these policies are seen in the heightened awareness among some sectors of Caribbean society in relation to cultural emphasis, strong nationalistic tendencies and anti-US feelings. In other cases, the injection of US capital investments has brought social and economic improvements which allow the US to have favourable ratings in some areas of Caribbean society. The US (and French) invasion of Haiti in 2004 – ironically the bicentennial year of Haitian independence – and their alleged role in the exiling of Jean Bertrand Aristide, have once more heightened Caribbean sensitivity towards US imperial tendencies.

Revision questions

- 1 Read the extract and answer the questions that follow:
Between the end of the Spanish-American-Cuban War, which broke out in 1898, and 1934, the United States of America tried to turn the Caribbean into a US Lake.
 - a State two reasons for the outbreak of the war mentioned in the extract.
 - b Use examples to explain how the US tried to 'turn the Caribbean into a US Lake' after 1898.
 - c State three ways in which people in the former Spanish-colonised Caribbean territories reacted to the attempt by the US to 'turn the Caribbean into a US Lake'.
- 2
 - a What was the nature of US activities in the British-colonised Caribbean territories during World War II?
 - b How accurate is the claim that the British-colonised Caribbean benefited from the US presence in the region in World War II?

the regime of Lynden Pindling. Pindling remained in power as Prime Minister until 1992.



Fig 17.9 Lynden Pindling

Did you know?

An Associated State is a territory that effectively has independence but maintains constitutional links with another country that handles its external affairs.

Associated Statehood had held out the promise of independence to Eastern Caribbean British-colonised territories.

By the early 1970s the idea that there was some firm association between size and sovereignty was exposed as a myth. So the less populated territories quickly moved towards seeking constitutional independence. According to the agreement with Britain when Associated Statehood was granted to these territories, all that was needed for the transition to independence was a two-thirds majority in a referendum. In other words, the majority of people, as opposed to only their leaders, had to agree to independence. In 1970 Eric Gairy, a once militant union leader who had been active in politics since the 1950s and who was then Premier of Grenada, began to examine the

possibility of independence for Grenada. But he pointed out the difficulty of achieving a two-thirds majority of consensus in islands that were divided into partisan political parties, with supporters divided on the matter of independence. So, Britain changed its position, promising to agree to independence if Gairy won an election in which independence was a campaign issue. In 1972, Gairy won the elections and constitutional talks were announced.

Internal opposition to the prospect of independence under Gairy resulted in social unrest in the island. Despite this the British government held to its promise and introduced the legislation necessary for Grenada to achieve its independence. Gairy's government became increasingly politically repressive and was unpopular in the late 1970s. There were demonstrations against him and the radical Maurice Bishop ousted him from power in 1979.

Bishop was leader of a group of young, mostly middle class activists who organised against Gairy's regime. Along with others like Bernard Coard, a Marxist, Bishop formed (and led) the New Jewel Movement (NJM). This was a left-wing party which was determined to rid the island of Gairy. The NJM realised that because of Gairy's alleged dishonest election practices, they could not hope to win power through the ballots. So they decided to seize power by armed insurrection, executing their plans while Gairy was out of the country. Bishop then led the People's Revolutionary Government (PRG). Under the PRG, Bishop introduced reforms designed to improve the conditions of the poor. Health, education and housing were improved. He encouraged wider participation in the island's political affairs by women and the community and he tried to encourage economic diversification away from dependence on primary export products. Like Michael Manley, he established close relations with socialist and communist countries which did not endear him to the USA. But by 1983 a power struggle had developed within the party.

Bernard Coard led a faction that opposed Bishop and tried to force him to introduce changes within the PRG – changes which Bishop did not support. A faction of the island's armed forces under Coard's leadership subsequently placed Bishop under house arrest. Bishop was freed by supporters and he, along with some of his ministers and supporters, took refuge in Fort Rupert. The pro-Coard military faction fired on the Fort, killing some of those within. Bishop and about six of his ministers were killed by a firing-squad. Coard and the military took over for a short while, forming the Revolutionary Military Council. With the support of Jamaica, Barbados and Dominica, the US invaded to restore order to Grenada. After this Hudson Austin (1983), Nicholas Brathwaite (1983-1984) and Herbert Blaize (1984-1989) came to power.