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Bonham C. Richardson
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The creation of the Caribbean

The US Department of Commerce's 1989 guidebook, entitled *Caribbean Basin Initiative*, provides thumbnail sketches of commercial opportunities throughout the Caribbean for potential American investors. Haiti, the black republic occupying the western third of Hispaniola, is described therein as a particularly appealing locale: "Haiti's low wages, productive labor, strong private sector, and close proximity to the United States have been very attractive to offshore manufacturers, especially in electronics, apparel, toys, and sporting goods" (1988: 55).

The guidebook is not intended, of course, as an academic treatise, and it would be inappropriate to use it as a target. Yet its implications about Haiti (and very similar comments about other places in the circum-Caribbean region) are clear and important. Haiti's "low wages" and "productive labor" are portrayed as local cultural characteristics. And the happy combination of these indigenous Haitian characteristics with the "close proximity" of the world's largest national market suggests that it is not only economically rational but also helpful to all concerned that US manufacturers send component materials to these undemanding yet productive laborers for the fabrication of baseballs, playsuits, and TV parts for the North American market.

An historical-geographical assessment of Haiti provides a less exuberant but more instructive perspective. Aboriginal peoples called the entire island Quisqueya. It was "discovered," claimed for Spain, and renamed Hispaniola by Christopher Columbus in 1492. Nearly all the aboriginal peoples died or were killed off within the following three decades. In 1697 the western part of the island became French St. Domingue. France brought tens of thousands of

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West African slaves to St. Domingue during the next century. Then the slaves rebelled against European control and established the independent republic of Haiti in 1804. Since then, the introduced overpopulation of African slaves and their descendants in Haiti have turned inward (partly because "civilized" countries refused to interact with Haiti for decades) to realize a near-hopeless case of overpopulation, ecological ruin, and poverty late in the twentieth century. Today's desperate pulsations of human migration from Haiti are attempts to escape this situation that in essence has been created by earlier European colonial strategies. One of the few local sources of wages is sweatshop fabrication of "electronics, apparel, toys, and sporting goods" in makeshift factories whose products are destined for the United States. And Haitians know full well that clamoring for higher wages or striking for better working conditions probably would send the Americans packing in search of more hospitable environs.

Haiti's particular characteristics are, of course, unique, but the general contours of her cumulative experiences of externally imposed underdevelopment have parallels elsewhere in the Caribbean and, in a broader sense, throughout the Third World. During the past quarter-century social scientists have begun to develop theoretical perspectives in attempting to explain these perceived regularities. Among the most prominent has been the sociologist-political scientist Immanuel Wallerstein's historical assessment of the origins and development of a European-centered world-economy, driven by capitalism and manifested by an international division of labor. Wallerstein asserts that since the late 1400s the genesis of the capitalist world-economy has led to the formation of "core areas" (which now include North America) and the outlying "periphery" (including Haiti and the rest of the Third World). Core and periphery are intimately linked by unequal economic exchanges, and low wages in the periphery (as opposed to high wages in the core) constitute a fundamental and enduring characteristic of the world-economy (1974).

It is not surprising that Wallerstein's (here very oversimplified) thesis, and its many progeny, has created intense debate and considerable excitement throughout the social sciences. If nothing else, the now ubiquitous world-economy outpouring has laid to rest the "strange peoples and places" way of viewing various other parts of the world. Scholars now look beyond the village walls or local gardens of Third World peoples to seek explanations as to how external events affect and are affected by village inhabitants. And

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these villagers, it is important to note, are no longer considered passive recipients of external stimuli but agents who are part of the global economy's overall trajectory. Among others, academic geographers have been enthused by the world-economy perspective (e.g., Taylor 1986, 1988). Geographers, whose long-held predilections with places and regions were overshadowed by spatially or geometrically oriented colleagues in the 1960s and 1970s, are beginning to re-discover places and regions through this world-economy perspective and therefore to reassess particular areas of the world in an entirely different way (e.g., Agnew 1987). Further, there are unmistakable diagnostic indications that the world-economy perspective has taken hold in academic geography, notably with the arrival of textbooks dealing with the idea (e.g., Knox and Agnew 1989) and an incipient countercurrent of literature among geographers objecting to the world-system framework as an analytical device (e.g., Harvey 1987).

In this book I attempt to view the Caribbean in a world-economy perspective. The term "perspective" is crucial because there is no attempt here to adhere so closely to a world-economy model so as to provide, for example, a theoretical comparison of Caribbean economic trends or cycles with waves and curves that others have perceived in the world-economy as a whole over the centuries. Rather, I attempt to show the ways in which external control of the Caribbean region has influenced landscapes, ecological problems, settlement forms, demographic characteristics, migration patterns, livelihood strategies, and other variables within the Caribbean – in other words, issues that have been traditional themes in academic geography. Although the emphasis here is geographical, I also emphasize the history of the region and its component parts throughout. The historical emphasis is not provided as obligatory and passive "background" material but as a concrete historical experience that informs the present and which in many ways continues to provide meaning and significance for the people who inhabit the Caribbean region today, very late in the twentieth century.

It is probably accurate to suggest that world-economy thinking in general has not been viewed as nearly so novel by Caribbeanists as it has by, say, academic specialists dealing with Africa or Asia. This is because of the obvious and thoroughgoing domination of the Caribbean region for centuries by external powerholders who have transformed landscapes and local populations to meet outside market needs. Long before world-economy or "dependency"-type concepts were common currency among social scientists, a consider-

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able literature – academic and popular – recognized the outward-focused character of the region. Caribbeanist academics now routinely use the world-economy framework to analyze contemporary economic data from the region (e.g., Ramsaran 1989). And Caribbean peoples have lamented for decades, as they do today, that local success often is achieved by those emigrating to North America or Europe and then returning, rather than by those who stay behind.

Much of the reason for the Caribbean's external focus is its longevity as an appendage of the world-economy. Columbus's voyage at the end of the fifteenth century brought the Caribbean into Europe's orbit as its first overseas colonial outpost. But for the next century and a half the Caribbean served essentially as a Spanish transit zone between Spain and its populous and mineral-rich colonial empire in Central and South America. The Caribbean region itself was not irrevocably harnessed to the European economy as a whole until the mid-seventeenth century, a harnessing that took place during the "long contraction" of the world-economy between 1600 and 1750 and because the Caribbean could produce tropical staples, mainly sugar cane, that could not be cultivated in Europe (Galloway 1989: 78–79; Hobsbawm 1967: 53–56; Wallerstein 1980: 166–67). Since that time the Caribbean has been closely linked with the European and, later, North American-centered world-economy, experiencing the innumerable and often damaging effects of international capitalism's advances and retreats, swings in commodity prices, and resultant booms and busts.

Over the centuries the Caribbean region has therefore been a geographical receptacle for a diverse flow of material items and cultural stimuli from outside the region – crops, weeds, animals, peoples, technology, food items, ideas, and much more. These variables have been absorbed, modified, and transformed in characteristic ways so that one may speak of regional "Caribbean" examples of, for example, ethnic identity, crop combinations, or settlement patterns. Yet it is crucial to note that regionality as expressed by regional characteristics in the Caribbean is an abstraction and perhaps more so than in other broadly delineated world regions. Within the Caribbean "regional" matrix, imported and local geographical variables have combined in a great many ways in different places so that the Caribbean is in reality a cultural mosaic of subtle complexity and incredible variety (Lowenthal 1960b); regularities identified in one Caribbean locale – to the chagrin of those who would seek broad regional generalizations – are often absent in the next. And those seeking explanations for this complex

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regional variety would probably find their most satisfying answers in exploring interactions among the region's lengthy colonial history, the variety of competing powers that have influenced the region, and the physical fragmentation of the Caribbean area itself.

The Caribbean's long association with Europe and its interaction with other world regions suggest that cross-regional comparisons might be fruitful. Indeed, one finds European housetypes, Asian religious edifices, and Africanisms of all sorts throughout the region. But – contrary to tourist brochures – Barbados is not a "Little England," Fort-de-France (in Martinique) is not a miniature Paris, and St. Maarten is vastly different from anything found in the Netherlands. Nor is the Caribbean, despite its geographical proximity, simply a neglected appendage of "Latin America" because, in world-economy parlance, the Latin American mainland was not "integrated into European intent at the same time, at the same rates, in the same ways, or with the same results as the Caribbean islands and their nearest mainland surroundings" (Mintz 1977: 254).

Although this book emphasizes for the most part the effects of external stimuli on the Caribbean region over the past half millennium, the Caribbean has reciprocated by affecting the internal character of the dominant metropolitan countries themselves. During the colonial plantation era, labor regimens on Caribbean sugar-cane plantations imposed a regimented, "industrial" routine on enslaved work forces well before the Industrial Revolution, as a kind of preview of what Western European workers later would experience. And the sugar produced by Afro-Caribbean slaves sweetened the coffee and tea that were important dietary supplements of Europe's burgeoning proletariat during the nineteenth century (Mintz 1985).

More immediately, in the late twentieth century emigration from the Caribbean region has brought hundreds of thousands of Caribbean peoples to the doorsteps of the colonial and neocolonial nations that have historically created the conditions encouraging these migrations in the first place. These newcomers have altered the fabric of their "host" countries by introducing their own foods, clothing, celebrations, work ethics, and zeal for education. Much more important, the somewhat sudden presence of large numbers of Caribbean peoples in North Atlantic metropoles provides the basis for serious self-reflection. For Americans who ostensibly pride themselves on their historic assimilation of peoples from throughout the world, the immigration of hundreds of thousands of Afro-Caribbean peoples into the United States represents at once a test of

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ability truly to welcome and assimilate as well as an extension of a more numerous Afro-American presence that is centuries old. For Europeans, Caribbean migration represents a geographic reversal of an issue as old as empire itself: the associations between rulers and ruled, abstractions formerly confined to the far corners of the globe, are now, owing largely to the presence of Caribbean peoples, local European issues of immediate significance (Richardson 1989).

It should come as little surprise that, given outsiders' domination of the Caribbean region for centuries, external perceptions of the region also have contributed to the confusion of just what is meant by "Caribbean" (Map 1). No one would disagree that the region's core consists of the arcuate archipelago of islands that stretches from the Yucatán and Florida peninsulas southeast to Venezuela, with the Greater Antilles (Cuba, Hispaniola, Puerto Rico, Jamaica) in the north and the smaller islands, or Lesser Antilles, generally to the south and east. This book also includes the Guianas, on the northeastern coast of South America, as "Caribbean" because of their close historical and cultural ties to the region (Lewis 1983: 2–3) and also the Central American rim, notably Belize, for the same reasons (Augelli 1962). As in the delineation of any large cultural region, these vague boundaries are fuzzy, permeable, and somewhat arbitrary. Beyond brief discussion of the noticeable Afro-Caribbean ethnic presence along the eastern lowlands of Nicaragua, Costa Rica, and Panama, for example, I choose not to include these countries within the Caribbean realm, as they are more conventionally "Central America." Yet these Central American nations, as an instance of how far the Caribbean region can extend according to some observers, are included in the United States' Caribbean Basin Initiative program. As a further example, one could make a strong case for including southern Florida as part of the Caribbean region on the basis of the immense cultural impact of the relatively recent arrival of hundreds of thousands of Caribbean peoples in the Miami area.

The term "West Indies" is roughly synonymous with "Antilles" and refers to the islands themselves, including the Greater and Lesser Antilles. "West Indies" is thus more restrictive than "Caribbean," and there is disagreement as to whether the Bahamas and the Dutch islands west of Trinidad are part of the West Indies. Residents of any of the islands are usually referred to as "West Indians" by most local English-speakers. Further confusion may be provided by noting that Belizeans and Guyanese are much more likely to be dubbed "West Indian" than are Spanish-speaking residents of Cuba, the Dominican Republic, and Puerto Rico.

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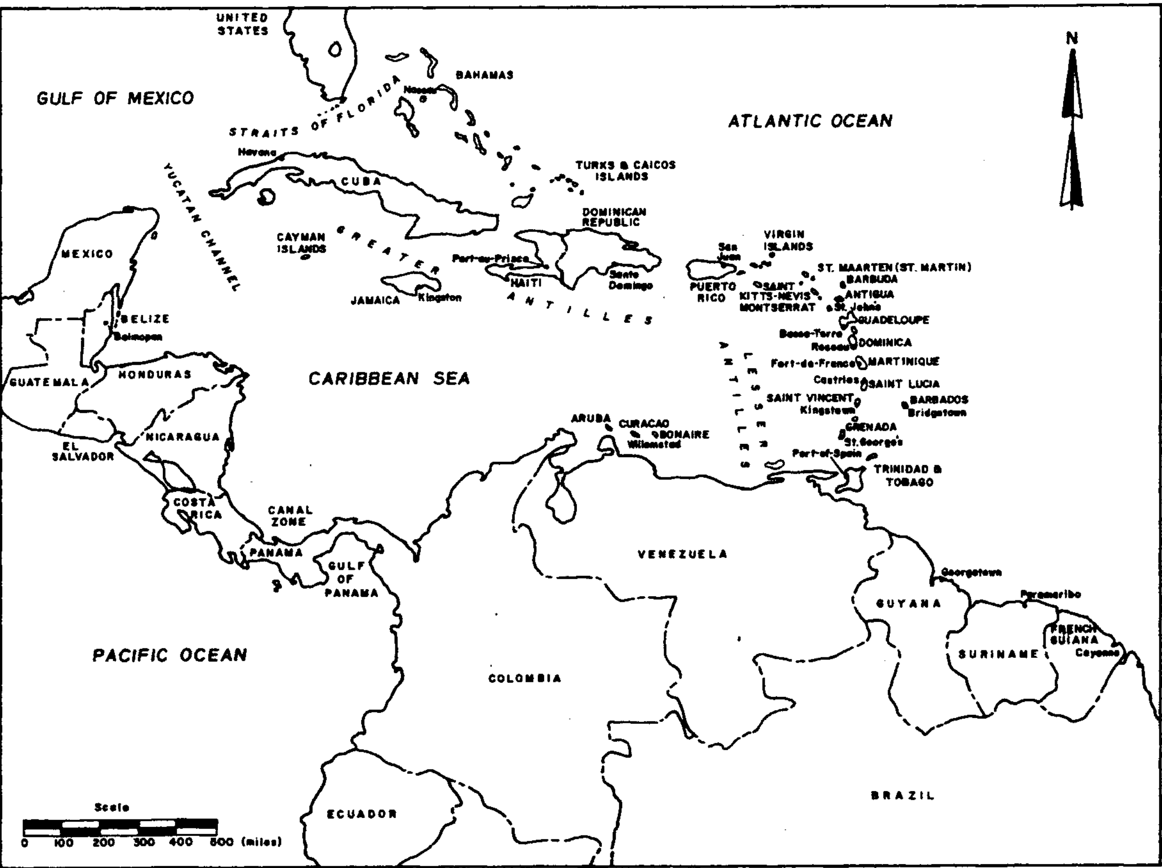

Map 1 The Caribbean region

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Lightly populated when compared to most other world regions, the Caribbean has roughly 33 million human residents (Table 1). Ethnically, the region is heavily black with perhaps two-thirds of its people of black African descent or with black African admixture. The preponderance of black peoples in most Caribbean locales is, of course, a legacy of the African slave trade of colonial times. And large "minority" segments of the Caribbean kaleidoscope of peoples – such as the Portuguese and Asian Indians of the southern Caribbean and many of Cuba's Spaniards – came as plantation workers after slavery. As they are elsewhere, skin color, social status, and the potential for economic prosperity are intimately bound up with one another in Caribbean locales. Skin color and "class" are, however, not always easily correlated with one another, and the many variations pertaining to ethnic identity and social status within the Caribbean region have spawned a massive academic literature (e.g., Hoetink 1967; Lowenthal 1972).

The Caribbean's cultural complexity is, however, perhaps more evident in its spectrum of spoken languages than in its array of skin colors. Spanish is the lingua franca for roughly 60 per cent of Caribbean peoples, the vast majority of them in Cuba, the Dominican Republic, and Puerto Rico. French is the language of France's three overseas departments, a French-based creole is the spoken and written language of Haiti, and most Dominicans (of Dominica) and St. Lucians speak a French-based language as well. Residents of the other former British colonies are English-speakers, although a few very old Trinidadians and Guyanese speak only Hindi. Dutch is not as common in the Netherlands Antilles; many residents of those islands speak a mixture of English, Dutch, and Spanish known as Papiamento. Aboriginal languages survive in the back country of the Guianas alongside the language used by the Suriname "Bush Negroes" who are descendants of escaped slaves and who converse with one another using many words of African derivation. Nuances from one island to the next in spoken languages ("Cuban" Spanish, "Jamaican" English) are noticeable to residents of the Caribbean but difficult for many visitors to detect. Many peoples of the Caribbean region are bilingual, especially in that the language they speak at home is very different from that same language they speak to outsiders. American television, some of it dubbed into local languages but much of it with its original American English, creates a considerable linguistic impact throughout the Caribbean late in the twentieth century.

I have written this book over a span of somewhat more than two

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years, a task interspersed with regular teaching duties and along with the preparation of other articles, papers, and reviews. A certain anxiety accompanies the preparation of any comparable book-length study because the author must be aware of material published during the writing that requires a rewriting or even rethinking of the work in progress. I have attempted to assimilate ideas from much of the very recent material dealing with the Caribbean appearing during my writing, although I am certain that some of it has escaped me. Similarly, and of even greater concern, is that I have written a book that is ultimately intended to portray the current character of the Caribbean region. Any such attempt is automatically unsuccessful to a degree because the lag time between the completion of a manuscript and the book's eventual appearance means that the latter will inevitably be something of an instant anachronism.

These points are gratuitous but nonetheless important for a book dealing with an entire region of the world. Their importance is underlined with a brief, selected list of particular events that have occurred and are occurring in the Caribbean – and very close to it – during the writing of this book: two major hurricanes have ravaged different parts of the region; Haiti's political regime has been overthrown twice; Michael Manley has defeated Edward Seaga to become Jamaica's Prime Minister, a reversal of the results of Jamaica's 1980 election; Puerto Rican momentum grows for the island to become the 51st US state; the American crackdown on the drug traffic throughout the region has had its most dramatic expression in the invasion of Panama in December, 1989; and the astounding political transformations in Eastern Europe combined with severe local economic decline lead many to wonder how much longer Fidel Castro can maintain control in Cuba.

Paralleling the headlines, a series of underappreciated yet geographically more important events also have taken place in the Caribbean during the writing of this book; they have less to do with recent sociopolitical changes and more to do with the region's continuity with its past: tens of thousands of babies have been born; thousands of young men and women have decided to emigrate; families have coped with rising prices of imported lumber and foodstuffs; seasonal tourists from Europe and North America have descended and then departed; small-scale farmers have calculated crop combinations in light of their subsistence needs, fluctuating external commodity prices, and local ecological characteristics. These everyday events are, of course, not unrelated to the more newsworthy items mentioned in the preceding paragraph. Nor can

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Table 1. *Caribbean country data*

	Political status	Area in square miles	Population (000s)	Capital city	Life expectancy	Per capita income (US)	Remarks
Anguilla	British Colony	35	7	The Valley (1,000)	71	—	tourism, shrimp
Antigua and Barbuda	Independent (1981)	171	83	St. John's (30,000)	70	2,380	tourism, oil refining
Aruba	Non-metropolitan territory of the Netherlands	75	60	Oranjestad (19,800)	74	2,350	tourism, banking
Bahamas	Independent (1973)	5,382	245	Nassau (110,000)	69	7,190	tourism, banking
Barbados	Independent (1966)	166	254	Bridgetown (102,000)	73	5,140	tourism, sugar cane
Belize	Independent (1981)	8,867	178	Belmopan (3,500)	69	1,170	citrus, sugar cane
British Virgin Islands	British Colony	59	12	Road Town, Tortola (2,500)	71	8,170	tourism, government employment
Cayman Islands	British Colony	102	23	George Town (11,500)	62	12,900	tourism, banking
Cuba	Independent (1902)	42,804	10,421	Havana (2,037,000)	75	2,690	sugar cane, nickel
Dominica	Independent (1978)	290	79	Roseau (8,300)	76	1,210	limes, bananas
Dominican Republic	Independent (1844)	18,704	6,850	Santo Domingo (1,410,000)	63	710	sugar cane, coffee
French Guiana	Overseas Department of France	33,399	92	Cayenne (37,000)	67	2,340	shrimp, French space station
Grenada	Independent (1974)	133	106	St. George's (7,500)	67	1,240	bananas, spices
Guadeloupe	Overseas Department of France	687	340	Basse-Terre (13,000)	73	3,300	sugar cane, tourism
Guyana	Independent (1966)	83,000	757	Georgetown (200,000)	69	500	sugar cane, bauxite

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