

# 9

## Caribbean society 1900–85



This chapter will answer the following questions.

- ❏ What was Caribbean society like during the period from 1900 to 1985?
- ❏ What was the economic condition of Caribbean people from 1900 to 1985?
- ❏ What was done to improve the socio-economic conditions of Caribbean people during this period?
- ❏ How did the various ethnic groups relate to each other?
- ❏ What were the major religious groups in Caribbean society and how did they change from the pre-1900 period to 1985?
- ❏ What changes were evident in recreational activities, art forms and communications?

In the last eight chapters, you have learned about the major events that happened in the Caribbean over the past five centuries. In this chapter, we will discuss how those events have created the kinds of societies we have today. By understanding your society, you can better understand yourself, because all of us are influenced by the history and the culture of the places we are born and grow up in.

### Social and economic conditions

**Infectious diseases** diseases that are spread from one individual to another.

**Non-communicable diseases** diseases that are not spread through human contact.

In the past century, human beings have progressed more than in the past 100,000 years of our existence. People now live longer and are generally healthier. Fewer babies die at birth. Before the 20th century, the average life expectancy was 30 years. It is now 70 years in most parts of the world and significantly higher

in developed nations. Whereas in the past people suffered and died from infectious diseases, the main causes of death now are non-communicable diseases, such as heart disease, diabetes and cancer. Poverty has been reduced more in the past 50 years than in the past five hundred – in fact, the average poor person today lives better than the average middle-class person three centuries ago and the average middle-class person now has far more possessions than the wealthy people of even a century ago. The only region in the world where this upward trend is not yet happening at the same level is sub-Saharan Africa and there are several other countries which have not had the same kind of advances experienced by most of the world. One Caribbean country – Haiti – is on this list, but the region as a whole has been part of this global progress.

In 1900, the total population of the Caribbean was 7 million; in 1960, it had risen three-fold to 21 million; and in 1985 it was 25 million. Table 9.1 shows the rate of growth in selected Caribbean countries for the latter part of the 20th century.

**Table 9.1** Population growth 1960–98

Percentage growth	Country
Under 0.5	Barbados, Grenada, St Kitts, Montserrat
0.5–1	Suriname, St Vincent, Dominica, Antigua, Martinique
1–1.5	Trinidad and Tobago, Guyana, Jamaica, Guadeloupe, Netherland Antilles, Aruba, Puerto Rico, Cuba
2–2.5	Anguilla
2.5–3	Bahamas, Belize, British Virgin Islands, Dominican Republic
Over 3	Caymans, French Guiana, US Virgin Islands

**Activity 9.1**

Give three reasons why you think the population growth rate in the region is so varied. Compare your reasons with those given by a classmate.

Nonetheless, all the territories in the Anglophone Caribbean are still classified as developing countries, even though Barbados ranks high on the United Nations Human Development Index and Trinidad and Tobago is classified as a high-income nation. Unemployment and a wide gap between rich and poor are still the pattern in most Caribbean countries.

After the Second World War, as you read in Chapter 6, economic growth was based largely on the export of minerals and of agricultural products such as bananas and sugar, as well as tourism, while the manufacturing sector also expanded. However, all the sectors which had significant growth (except the banana industry) were foreign-owned. This means that, despite political independence, most important decisions affecting the region's economy were made in other, more developed nations. Not enough use was made of domestic natural resources, savings were too low, Caribbean entrepreneurs rare and technologies mostly imported.

Agriculture, the sector on which the Caribbean economy was founded, has become weaker throughout the 20th century, with most countries in the region importing food, from North and South America mainly, for both local and tourist consumption. In the 1960s, economist W. Arthur Lewis described agriculture as a 'dying industry' and, while the sector continues to provide some significant employment in the smaller territories

and in Guyana, it remains underdeveloped because of a lack of mechanization and because agricultural produce is not used in food processing – both key measures to make the sector profitable.

Manufacturing also has been unable to become a significant driver of the Caribbean economies, mainly because the sector has remained heavily dependent on foreign money for investment, imported technology, and imported raw materials and components. Additionally, many of these foreign-owned manufacturing industries set up in the region only because they were allowed to avoid paying taxes for a certain period of time. This has meant that manufacturing spends as much foreign exchange as it earns, so it provides little or no advantage in trade. Similar weaknesses apply to the tourist industry.

## Housing

The earliest Caribbean houses were called wattle huts which, demonstrating a West African building technique, had walls of braided twigs. In early times in Haiti, many houses were built from the royal palm trees, using the palm fronds for the roof and the trunks to make the walls. In later centuries, box-like houses painted brightly in blue, yellow and red became the dominant style.

In architecture, a fundamental principle is 'form follows function'. This means that buildings should be designed for effective use. Even if features are put in for aesthetic reasons (that is, to look attractive) these features, in a well-designed building, should have some purpose. When you look at houses, public buildings or office buildings

in your country, you can examine whether the materials used or the ways, for example the roofs are designed, adhere to this principle.

By the 18th century, wood-shingled houses had become common. The walls of these houses were made with spider-like two-by-four planks pressed against a triangular roof. In the bigger houses, four-poster beds with mosquito nets were the usual furniture, along with mahogany side tables and mahogany rocking chairs with wicker seats. A unique piece of Caribbean furniture was the planter chair, which had a wicker seat, a round back and long arms that swung out so the planter could put up his legs while a servant pulled off his leather boots.

In the 19th century, cast iron was used to make the first kind of pre-fabricated houses, but these generated too much heat for the Caribbean climate. The influence of the colonial can be seen in many of the old buildings, such as St Nicholas's Abbey in Barbados, which has columns with a veranda, curved arches and four chimneys – a style which is totally inappropriate to the Caribbean in terms of scale or comfort. The houses in Barbados owed much to their British heritage, having Gothic lines and an enclosed veranda, but with delicate fretwork and rectangular shutters that were a Caribbean addition.

### Activity 9.2

Find out about the Barbadian chattel house. How were these houses built? What was unique about them? How has this style of architecture influenced houses today?

At the start of the 20th century, more and more people began moving from the rural areas to the urban centres. Until this time, houses were rarely painted, but this became a more widespread practice between the two world wars. The urban movement started right after emancipation, mostly because there were jobs in the towns and cities that paid better, including work on the agricultural estates there. This movement, as it does in countries all over the world, created slums, as the newly arrived people constructed wattle huts (with woven tree branches and leaves), adobe (clay) houses or wooden shacks to live in.

In one settlement located just outside the capital city of Port-of-Spain in Trinidad, writes one historian:

‘Laventille and East Dry River for the first time became thickly populated, creating over a century ago sub-standard housing which has continued from then till now, to provide accommodation for successive bands of displaced persons... So great was the exodus that five months later, by the end of December 1838, of the 22,359 former slaves, only a mere 8,000 were to be found on the estates.’

This trend sped up during the Second World War, because of the additional jobs provided by the Americans, and it continued after the war ended in 1945 because there were fewer jobs in the rural areas and more in the urban centres. By 1960, 40% of people in the Caribbean were living in urban centres. By the end of the 20th century, the ratio had increased to 59%. Different territories have different levels of urbanization. It is highest in Puerto Rico, the Bahamas and Martinique, where over 90% of the population live in towns and cities. More than 75% of the people in the US Virgin Islands, Suriname, Cuba and the Netherlands Antilles also live in the urban areas. The countries with largest numbers living in rural areas are Haiti, Grenada, Guyana, Montserrat, St Kitts and Nevis, and St Lucia

In 1950, only seven urban areas in the region had more than 100,000 people, but by 2008 there were 30 such cities in the Caribbean. This has caused significant housing problems in many countries.

Caribbean cities almost all had the same appearance when they were founded, based on Spanish custom. The cities were usually located on the coast and had a central plaza and a grid pattern of streets. All the most important buildings, from government offices to churches, were located around this plaza. Now, while these central districts still have the largest and most impressive buildings, the surrounding areas contain ‘shanty towns’, typical in many Caribbean cities.

As a general rule, most people in the urban areas live in brick or concrete dwellings, while in most rural areas wooden houses are dominant. Architectural styles have been influenced mainly by wealth and to some extent by culture. Caribbean countries have developed their unique architectural styles based on their historical cultures, the tropical climate and indigenous aesthetics. ‘Creole’ architectural features are those which have developed locally. Wooden jalousie shutters, for example, used to be a typical feature of houses, and are still common in the smaller islands. Features like porches are British Caribbean, but the woodwork of the eaves, which consists of frills and lacework, are purely local. Dormer windows (the kind that project vertically from a sloping roof) are a French Caribbean feature that help keep houses cool by circulating air under the roof. Houses were often built so their shuttered windows faced east to west, allowing the prevailing winds to cool them more efficiently. The middle classes live in concrete houses, designed along US or British styles, which are enclosed because of the temperate climate in those countries but which are unsuitable for the tropics. The upper classes also mimic this style to a large extent, but it is also among this set of very wealthy people that you will see houses designed for the Caribbean climate and landscape – that is, with high ceilings, large windows and a porch to take advantage of the breeze and allow the tropical heat to dissipate. Such houses use wood and stone in their construction and design, and may even have wooden louvres rather than glass windows.

### Activity 9.3

Find photographs or illustrations of three different styles of houses in your country.

**Table 9.2** Percentage ratios of the population in urban and rural areas in selected Caribbean countries

Countries with most urban population	%	Countries with most rural population	%
Puerto Rico	98	Montserrat	85
Martinique	98	Trinidad and Tobago	85
Bahamas	91	St Lucia	72
US Virgin Islands	95	St Kitts and Nevis	72

Generally speaking, the countries with the largest proportion of people in the urban areas have a more urgent need for housing. However, it is important to keep in mind how crowded each country is – that is, the ratio of land to population which tells us what the population density of the country is. On this basis, the most crowded Caribbean nation is Barbados, with a population density of 589 people per square kilometre. The least crowded is Suriname, which has three people per square kilometre. You should note, though, that most of Suriname and Guyana (which has four people per square kilometre) have large tracts of forest and swamp, which are difficult to inhabit.

### What measures were implemented to improve the socio-economic conditions of Caribbean people during the period from 1900 to 1985?

- ⊙ Social organizations developed: in the post-1930 period, after the Labour Riots, many groups and organizations were formed which provided assistance to people in impoverished areas. For example, public assistance, soup kitchens and homes for the poor and homeless were established.
- ⊙ Trade unions emerged from 1937 onwards which fought for better working conditions of labourers, higher wages and job security. The following is a list of trade unions which were established from 1937 onwards.

#### Barbados

Progressive League

#### St Vincent

Workingmen’s Association

#### Jamaica

People’s National Party

Jamaica Workers’ and Tradesmen’s Union

Jamaica United Clerks’ Association

#### Trinidad and Tobago

All-Trinidad Sugar Estates and Factory Workers’ Union

Seamen and Waterfront Workers’ Union

Public Works Workers’ Union

Oilworkers’ Trade Union

### Federated Workers' Union

### Transport and General Workers' Union.

- ⦿ Labour laws were developed to protect the rights of the workers. Laws pertaining to shorter working hours, workers' compensation, better working conditions, restrictions on child labour and social insurances were debated and put into effect.
- ⦿ Universal adult suffrage was introduced so individuals over the age of 18 had the right to vote.
- ⦿ In many territories, schools were constructed and primary school education was introduced. In others, secondary schools were built and more students had an opportunity to complete studies at secondary level.
- ⦿ The larger and/or richer territories such as Trinidad, Barbados and Jamaica started to build hospitals, highways and secondary roads, housing developments and sport facilities.
- ⦿ Welfare schemes, including free education and school meals in Barbados, were all very important in improving the socio-economic conditions of Caribbean people.

## Cost of living

As you learned in Chapter 8, the rising cost of living was a key factor behind the protests and demonstrations in the 1930s in the British Caribbean. The government in the various countries tried to ease the burden by spending more on public services, such as education and health. In 1900, this expenditure was just US\$7 per person, but by 1960 it had risen to US\$69 per person.

The increase is not as much as it seems, however, because the price of goods and services would also have gone up in those 60 years. This is called inflation. A useful indicator of the cost of living is the inflation rate, which is the percentage by which prices rise from one year to the next. For example, if your pen costs \$1 today and \$2 next year, the inflation rate was 100% for your pen. For most

of the second half of the 20th century, the Caribbean had an average inflation rate of between 3% and 5%. In other words, every year people were paying between 3% and 5% more for food, clothing, transport and so on. During the 1970s, this rate soared as high as 15–20% in many countries, because of a rise in world oil prices. Inflation affects poor people more seriously than the rich, because the poor spend a greater part of their income on necessities, such as food.

Another useful indicator is GDP per head. This looks at the amount of goods and services produced by a country, divided by the population. It is a crude indicator of how wealthy the country is. It is crude because it does not always tell you how well off all people are, since the distribution of wealth might be skewed, with most of it going to a small set of people. For example, Barbados has a higher standard of living than St Kitts and Nevis, even though the latter has a higher GDP per head. Table 9.3 lists the four richest and four poorest Caribbean countries based on GDP per head at the start of the 21st century.

**Table 9.3** Wealthiest and poorest countries in the Caribbean based on GDP per head

	Country	GDP per head (\$)
The four wealthiest Caribbean countries:	Bahamas	16,000
	St Kitts and Nevis	7,000
	Trinidad and Tobago	6,270
	Barbados	6,025
The four poorest Caribbean countries:	Cuba	2,535
	Suriname	1,775
	Guyana	807
	Haiti	427

## Working conditions

If we take as our starting point the conditions of slavery, it is obvious that Caribbean people have much better working conditions at present than in the past. However, even if we compare conditions at the beginning of the 20th century with the situation now, most people are better off in their workplaces.

### MARCUS GARVEY

(1887–1940)



**9.1** Marcus Garvey

Marcus Garvey was born in St Ann's Bay, Jamaica. At the age of 14 he left school to work as an apprentice at a printing firm, where he led a strike for higher wages. He went on to become a leading political activist.

In 1914, Garvey founded the United Negro Improvement Association (UNIA), which became an important lobby group. Garvey pressured the British government over issues such as wages, civil liberties such as the right to strike, universal adult suffrage and land ownership for people of African descent in the Caribbean. The UNIA, trade unions and other civic groups all made gradual headway in winning such rights for ordinary workers.

### Activity 9.4

Marcus Garvey was said to be a man ahead of his time. Find out more about Marcus Garvey and present your information either as a poster or a PowerPoint presentation. Use the following headings to guide you in your research.

- a Personal life
- b Education
- c Political and social/cultural activities
- d Accomplishments
- e Impact on Caribbean society.

### The United Negro Improvement Association (UNIA)



**9.2** Members of the United Negro Improvement Association (UNIA) founded by Marcus Garvey, parade in Harlem, New York City, 1924

Soon after Marcus Garvey established the Universal Negro Improvement Association (UNIA) in 1914, its membership increased rapidly and within three years it had established 30 branches and comprised over two million members. By 1920, the UNIA had over 1,000 branches in more than 40 countries. The majority of its branches were located in the USA and this country was also its operating base.

The UNIA was committed to the growth of 'black consciousness'; that is, a sense of identity among Africans. It promoted racial pride and the establishment of an independent black nation in Africa.

In 1917, *Negro World* was published. This journal promoted Garvey's ideas of African nationalism and African pride. It promoted the idea of the brotherhood of man and fatherhood of god. The UNIA's motto was 'One God! One Aim! One Destiny!'





The UNIA collapsed in 1935 but during its lifespan it contributed immensely to the growth of an African identity and African pride. It also influenced the formation of other organizations and the ideas of Garvey, or 'Garveyism', spread throughout the world.

Most Caribbean countries now have a legally enforced minimum wage, but private companies generally offer workers wages which are equal to, or higher than, the stipulated amount. Most people now work an eight-hour day and 40-hour week, and have weekends and public holidays off work. Vacation time is also now written into law or company regulations. If people choose to work extra hours or days, they may be paid extra. Since the 1980s, many governments have also passed laws which prevent child labour. Maternity leave, even when not law, is granted by most employers.

While workers' rights still remain a contentious issue, the kind of authority wielded in the past by employers, which sparked off many of the protests of the 1930s, hardly exists now. Wage rates also remain a cause for concern, with the average person earning an income which supports a working-class, rather than a middle-class, lifestyle. However, trade unions have generally been able to wrest regular pay increases every three years or so, save in times of economic downturn.

### Maternity leave in selected Caribbean countries

#### Barbados

In Barbados, the Employment of Women (Maternity Leave) Act was passed in 1976. It stated the following.

- ⦿ Every employee, in addition to her annual holiday under the Holidays with Pay Act, is entitled to maternity leave upon delivering to her employer:
  - a** a certificate issued by a medical practitioner setting forth the expected date of her confinement; or
  - b** a certificate issued by a medical practitioner or a midwife setting forth the actual date of her confinement.
- ⦿ An employer may accept such other evidence in support of the entitlement of an employee to



maternity leave as may be reasonable having regard to the circumstances of a particular case.

- ⦿ In order to qualify for a grant of maternity leave, an employee:
  - a** must be employed for at least 12 months by the employer from whom she requests such leave; and
  - b** is not entitled to maternity leave by the same employer on more than three occasions.

#### Jamaica

In Jamaica the Maternity Leave Act was passed in 1979. It stated the following.

- ⦿ The employer of a worker shall grant her leave, to be known as maternity leave, if that worker:
  - a** informs the employer that she is, or wishes to be, absent from work wholly or partly because of her pregnancy or confinement and that she intends to return to work with the employer
  - b** has been continuously employed by the employer for a period of not less than 52 weeks at the date on which her absence begins, or, being in seasonal employment, has been engaged by that employer in that employment for periods which amount to not less than 52 weeks during the five years immediately preceding that date; and
  - c** produces for the inspection of the employer, if the employer so requests, a certificate from a registered medical practitioner stating that it is necessary for the worker to be absent from work wholly or partly because of her pregnancy or confinement.

#### Trinidad and Tobago

In Trinidad and Tobago the Maternity Protection Act was passed in 1998. It stated the following.

- ⦿ A pregnant employee was entitled to:
  - a** leave of absence for the purpose of maternity leave
  - b** pay while on maternity leave
  - c** resume work after such leave on terms no less favourable than were enjoyed by her immediately prior to her leave.
- ⦿ Where an employee has proceeded on maternity leave and the child of the employee dies at birth or within the period of the maternity leave, the employee shall be entitled to the remaining period of maternity leave with pay.





- ⊙ Where an employee has not proceeded on maternity leave and:
  - a a premature birth occurs and the child lives, the employee is entitled to the full period of maternity leave with pay; or
  - b a premature birth occurs and the child dies at birth or at any time within 13 weeks thereafter, the employee is entitled to the full or remaining period of maternity leave with pay, as the case may be.

An employee who is pregnant and who has, on the written advice of a qualified person, made an appointment to attend at any place for the purpose of receiving prenatal medical care shall, subject to this Act, have the right not to be unreasonably refused time off during her working hours to enable her to keep the appointment.

## Unemployment

Up until the 1980s, unemployment was a major problem in all the Anglophone islands and, despite some improvement, it remains so today. In Jamaica unemployment averages between 20% and 30% of the workforce; in Barbados and in Trinidad and Tobago it is between 17% and 18%; and in the smaller islands more than 20% of the workforce are usually unemployed. In developed countries, the unemployment rate is usually below 10%.

### Roleplay

Imagine that you are a man or woman living in one of the Caribbean territories in the late 1940s. You are the sole breadwinner in your family and you have just lost your job. State three ways in which this may affect you and your family. Make sure to specify whether you are male or female and the territory where you live. Explain one way in which you would cope in this situation.

Unemployment for women remains a cause for concern in many Caribbean countries, although historically female participation in the workforce has been relatively high. At the start of the 21st century, the average rate of unemployment for women in the Caribbean was 20%. This rate ranged from a high of 35% in French Guiana to a low of 8% in Aruba.

## Health

The ultimate indicator of an improvement in health is whether people are living longer or not. In the Caribbean, life expectancy has risen significantly since 1900. At the start of the 20th century, average life expectancy was as low as 50 years in the Caribbean. Infectious diseases such as yellow fever, malaria, dysentery and tuberculosis shortened life expectancy. By the 1960s, with improved medical science and availability of health care, average life expectancy had increased to 60 years. Most Caribbean governments pay attention to providing good health care for their citizens, spending between 4% and 7% of their GDP on the health sector.

Now, the average Caribbean male can expect to live to 68 years of age, and the average Caribbean female to 73 years. Lifestyle diseases have become the main causes of death, such as cancer because of smoking, and heart attacks, strokes and diabetes because of poor diet and lack of exercise.

## Aspects of social life

### Ethnic or race relations

As it consists of developing countries, the Caribbean region is exceptional in having had few or no incidents of racial violence in the 20th century. The closest any country came to this was in Guyana under the Forbes Burnham regime, which from the 1960s to the early 1980s disenfranchised the Indo-Guyanese through rigged elections. Nor have there been widespread Afro-Caribbean attacks on white Caribbean people, even though there are pockets of historical resentment against a group seen to represent the former slave masters and who are still economically dominant in the region.

Nonetheless, some Caribbean territories have created their own versions of race prejudice. In Puerto Rico, for example, Dominicans are often resented, while in Haiti the mixed race group is regarded as privileged. This should not be interpreted as the total lack of interaction among the



groups, however. What is important to note is that during slavery a conscious attempt was made by those in the dominant white group to separate themselves from the non-white groups and that higher status was given to whites. This attitude has passed to the present Caribbean to some extent. That is, there are still communities where light-skin complexion is given higher status. This has seeped to some areas of employment, for example where customer service representatives are chosen because of their complexion.

Racial tensions have been expressed mostly in Guyana and in Trinidad and to some extent this is because of the presence of a larger percentage of people of Indian ancestry. In Trinidad, there is relatively similar percentages of African and Indian origin (approximately 40% each) and the rest of the society belongs to mixed groups. When all groups were free (when slavery was abolished and indentured labour ended) the two main ethnic groups had to compete for economic and political power and this led to some amount of tension between the groups. In recent times, this tension is seen mainly at election time. At no time did this tension turn into violence. Generally, both ethnic groups interact with each other on a daily basis in schools, places of employment, social activities and so on. In Guyana, the two ethnic groups have remained more separate from each other than in the case of Trinidad and Tobago. In both countries, race relations has had an impact on politics. Throughout the Caribbean, other minorities, especially those who are seen as economically successful, are often targets of resentment from the majority, although such emotions rarely go beyond rhetoric. These minority groups include Chinese in Trinidad, Jamaica, Guyana and Martinique; Syrian or Lebanese in Trinidad and Tobago, and the Dominican Republic; and Jews in Curaçao and Jamaica.

In general though, the Caribbean is an example where the logical expectations of history have been proved wrong. Anyone who looked at the violent past of the region might reasonably have expected that, once the enslaved Africans were freed, they

### Plural societies

The concept of a plural society has often been used by historians and sociologists to explain why different groups co-exist in a community but do not integrate. In a plural society different ethnic groups keep their own identities, beliefs and traditions. In some Caribbean countries, there are many different ethnic groups who all co-exist but yet do not integrate; that is, they do not share each other's customs and traditions, inter-marry and so on. They live in the same country but identify themselves as separate, distinct groups. In other Caribbean countries, the various ethnic groups have inter-married and interacted so that there are no separate identities among them.

might attack the whites eventually. At the very least, anyone looking at the past might have expected racial resentments to last well into the next few generations. However, while the Caribbean is a violent place, in that it has one of the highest murder rates in the world, group violence has not been a consequence of the region's history of oppression.

### Groupwork

In a group of three or four people, consider the following situation.

There are two teachers, one male and one female, of different ethnic groups. They go out often for lunch and socialize with each other on a regular basis. How do you think their co-workers would react if they were seen in each of the following towns:

- ⊙ Kingston, Jamaica
- ⊙ Bridgetown, Barbados
- ⊙ Georgetown, Guyana
- ⊙ Port-of-Spain, Trinidad?

### Festivals and celebrations

The main festival which defines the Caribbean is the carnival. The best-known one takes place in Trinidad in February or March, depending on when Ash Wednesday falls. Equivalent carnivals take place in the other islands, but at different times of the year, such as May in St Vincent and August in Jamaica. Carnivals also have different lengths, with Cropover in Barbados lasting five weeks from

### Divali

Divali is celebrated by Hindus. It is popularly referred to as the 'Festival of Lights'. Prior to this day, Hindus paint, clean and decorate their homes. They believe that the Goddess Lakshmi, who is worshipped as the giver of wealth and prosperity, will only enter a clean home. On Divali day they prepare feasts and invite friends to their homes to celebrate with them.

They perform puja (prayers) to Lakshmi and light deeyas (small clay pots). A cotton wick is placed in the deeya, filled with oil and then lit. There are large public celebrations all over Guyana, and Trinidad and Tobago. In the weeks leading up to the Festival of Lights many businesses, other organizations, schools and temples hold celebrations.

Divali is celebrated as a time of cleansing, purification and reflection on life. It is rooted in Indian tradition and Hindus celebrate Divali to commemorate the return of the god Ram to the city of Ayodhya after one year of exile in the forest. It is celebrated on the darkest night of the year according to the Hindu calendar and symbolizes the celebration of light over darkness and good over evil.

### Eid-ul-Fitr

Eid-ul-Fitr is a festival celebrated by Muslims. It is celebrated at the end of the month of Ramadan. This is a month during which Muslims fast from sunrise to sunset, they practise self-control and engage in inner reflection. The month usually begins with the sighting of the new moon. At the end of this month of Ramadan, Muslims celebrate the end of fasting and they give thanks to Allah for helping them fast the previous month.

They hold open-air worship in mosques and parks. They dress in new clothes and decorate their homes and invite friends over for celebratory meals. Eid-ul-Fitr is symbolic in that Muslims see it as a time to forgive others, to give to those less fortunate and to improve oneself through inner reflection and positive thoughts.

### Activity 9.6

Write a letter to your friend in another Caribbean country, telling him or her how you celebrate Christmas in your country. Explain how you will spend the day. Describe the types of food that your family will make and anything that you will find only in your area, village or country.

July to August though there is only one day of masquerade, whereas the Trinidad carnival lasts two days, but carnival fetes begin from January. Carnivals are rooted in the slave experience and each festival is an indigenous celebration created out of each island's historical experience and French, British and African cultures.

### Activity 9.5

Do research on carnival in your country and any one other country in the region. Where did carnival originate? How has carnival changed over the years? How does it benefit your country?

In Trinidad and Guyana in particular, the Indians have also brought their own cultural events. The main Hindu festival is Divali, or the Festival of Lights, which involves lighting wicks in small clay pots called deeyas and serving Indian food. The main Muslim festival is Eid-ul-Fitr which marks the ending of the fast held during the month of Ramadan. On this day, Muslims give alms to the poor and make special meals such as sawine.

## Recreation and art forms

There are also other minor festivals, which are driven more by economic considerations than cultural impulses. Sailing is a popular activity in the region, especially for tourists, and there are several regattas, with the ones in Antigua and Grenada being the best known. Music festivals are also important and Jamaica's Reggae Sumfest in July attracts many visitors. Reggae is a music genre that first developed in Jamaica in the 1960's. Bob Marley is probably the most recognisable face of the genre and reggae has since spread to many countries across the world, often incorporating local instruments and fusing with other genres. Marley's music was heavily influenced by the social issues of his homeland, and he is considered to have given voice to the specific political and cultural situation of Jamaica at the time.

The average Caribbean person often relaxes by playing or watching sports, the two most popular being cricket and football.



9.3 Damian Marley performing at Sumfest in Montego Bay, Jamaica, 2009

### West Indies cricket team

The West Indian cricket team, also known as the Windies, is a multi-national team representing 15 territories. The team originated in the 1890's when the first sides were selected to play visiting English sides. The team played their first official international match in 1928, becoming the fourth Test nation. They first beat England at Lord's in 1950, and by the 1970's had a formidable reputation in international cricket.



9.4 The logo of the West Indies cricket team

## Transport and communication

From oxen to horses to motor vehicles, the Caribbean has followed developments elsewhere in the world as it has modernized the islands' internal transport systems. However, the physical separation of the islands still poses problems, with no national or regional air carrier or boat service able to run at a profit. Every Caribbean country has at least one airport and several ports for ships.

Most of the territories now have good road networks, and land-line telephone as well as mobile cell networks. In the continental countries, such as Guyana and Suriname, vast swathes of territory remain unreachable save by small aircraft or river boats.

### Means of transportation in the Caribbean

In the early years, travel was by:

- ⊙ animal transportation – carts (drawn by horses, bulls, bison) – horseback
- ⊙ vehicles – lorries, trucks, cars
- ⊙ bicycles, scooters and motorcycles
- ⊙ airplanes
- ⊙ ferries, boats.

Present day transportation includes:

- ⊙ vehicles – cars and trucks
- ⊙ scooters and motorcycles
- ⊙ ships
- ⊙ airplanes – Caribbean Airlines (formerly known as British West Indian Airways) LIAT, Air Jamaica, Suriname Airways, Air Guyana, St Lucia Airline, Winair, Air Caraibes.

### Activity 9.7

What was the transport network like in your country in the past?

How has its historical development affected the development of the Caribbean region?

## Religious groups

Religions exist in all societies, but the form of any particular religion is shaped by many factors. History is one of the forces which determines religious practices. In the Caribbean, most of the world's major religions are represented, such as Christianity,

Hinduism and Islam. The last two are practised mainly in Trinidad and Guyana because of the large Indian populations in these countries. Christianity in the Caribbean can be divided into its different groups, such as Roman Catholic, Anglican, Methodist and Pentecostal. There are also religious groups which have been strongly influenced by African cultural traits. Some of these religions combine Christian and African rituals and beliefs and people practising them are found in Haiti, Cuba, the Dominican Republic, Puerto Rico and Trinidad. Table 9.4 lists these religions and their associated groups.

Apart from the Africanist religions, there are what are called revivalist religions. These are churches based on charismatic Protestant movements, mostly brought in from the USA. These churches are found throughout the Anglophone Caribbean. Then there are the groups which emphasize the magical aspects of religion, such as foretelling the future, healing through herbs and rituals, and divine revelations. These are found in Jamaica, Puerto Rico and Cuba. Another category is the one most directly influenced by the Caribbean's history of slavery: redemptionist

religions, which emphasize regaining the African heritage and throwing off colonial influences. These are found mainly in Jamaica, although there are small groups in some of the other islands.

#### Roleplay

Imagine that one of your close friends has persuaded you to become a redemptionist. Now you want to get two other friends to become redemptionists. Prepare a short speech that you will give to them, outlining the reasons why they should join this religious group with you. Remember, you have to sound very convincing.

**Table 9.4** Types of religion

Type of religion	Group
Africanist	Vodun, Santeria, Orisha, Shango
Revivalist	Pentecostal, Baptist, Seventh-Day Adventist, Shouters, Tie-Heads, Jordanites, Spirit Baptists, Cohortes
Magical	Myalism, Native Baptist, Spiritual Baptists, Espertismo, Karedecismo
Redemptionist	Rastafarianism, Nation of Islam
Eastern	Hinduism, Islam



**9.5** Gros Islet Church in St Lucia



**9.6** A Voodoo (Vodun) ceremony near Port-au-Prince, Haiti, December 2007

While all these religions draw on roots from other parts of the world, three can be categorized as native to the Caribbean in that their rituals and beliefs were developed in the region among the African population. These are Vodun, Santeria and Orisha. Their development was possible mainly through the Maroons who, when they ran away and formed their own communities, were able to practise freely the rituals they had brought with them from Africa. Santeria, for example, has elements from Nigerian Yoruba practices, while Vodun is based on rituals from Dahomey and Congo. The religions practised by the Amerindians in the Caribbean died out along with the natives.

### Activity 9.8

Find out more about either Vodun, Santeria or Orisha. Make a poster depicting the main beliefs and celebrations of the religion you have chosen to research.

The extent to which Christianity is incorporated into these Africanist religions is a consequence of history and the policies practised by the different European governments. There is less African influence in the former British colonies, because the British did not try to convert the enslaved Africans to Anglicanism until the early 19th century. In the French territories, however, the Africans were exposed to Christian beliefs from the 16th century, and the Roman Catholic tradition, with its many saints, made that religion more compatible with the beliefs brought by the enslaved Africans. So from the start, African elements were woven into the French and Spanish Christian tradition.

In every territory, however, the fact that the Anglican and Catholic churches were the most wealthy and powerful provided strong motivation for Africans to join them. But the Methodist church also gained many members, mainly through post-emancipation efforts to win rights and resources for the former slaves. In the late 20th century, Pentecostal and Evangelical churches began gaining ground in the Caribbean. This movement is strongly linked to the evangelical movement in the USA, which was started in 1906 by Charles Parham (1872–1906) in the city of Los Angeles.

### Roleplay

If you were a person of African or Indian ancestry, living in a Caribbean territory in the 1940s, why would you consider joining the Roman Catholic or Anglican churches?

After the British territories became independent in the 1960s, the Africanist religions slowly began to gain more adherents, mainly because the independence movement was linked to the search for ancestral roots. This ideology was part of the 1970 Black Power Revolution in Trinidad that you read about in Chapter 8.

### Rastafarianism

Rastafarianism, which is the best-known religion from the Caribbean, started in Jamaica in the early years of the 20th century. The movement may be traced back to 1784. A US



9.7 Haile Selassie (1892–1975), Emperor of Ethiopia, 1930–74

slave named George Liele was freed by his owner and then founded in Jamaica a church which he called the Ethiopian Baptist Church. This linked Christianity to Africa. Another important development was the founding of the Native Baptist Church by Alexander Bedward in 1891. Bedward claimed to have healing powers, that he was Jesus reborn and that white civilization would be destroyed after he and his followers ascended to heaven where, because they had suffered so much on Earth, they would be more exalted than white people.

This belief in redemption would become integral to the Rastafarian movement, which emerged in Jamaica shortly after 1930, when Haile Selassie became Emperor of Ethiopia. Selassie claimed to be the 225th descendant of the line of King David and the Queen of Sheba from the Bible. His enthronement was linked with a prophecy made

by Marcus Garvey about a black messiah who would free all black people from oppression.

Rastafarianism in the Caribbean is characterized by:

- the colours red, green and gold, with red standing for the blood of the martyrs in the black struggle for liberation; gold representing the wealth of their African homeland and green symbolizing Ethiopia's beauty and lush vegetation – black is often also included, representing the colour of the Africans
- consuming natural foods (foods that are not chemical-based)
- vegetarianism
- sporting dreadlocks
- a belief in peace and community-based economic activity.

### Activity 9.9

How has Rastafarianism had an impact on Caribbean culture in relation to:

- song and music
- recreation
- dress
- food?

## Islam

The first Muslims to enter the Caribbean came as enslaved Africans. Islamic conquerors had been present in Africa since the 10th century, and the Mandingo, Fulani and several other tribes had converted to Islam. Unfortunately, there are no detailed records about them or their religious practices in the Caribbean. So it was not until after emancipation, when the first set of Indian indentured labourers were brought to the Caribbean, that the Muslim religion became part of the cultural landscape of the region. Islamic organizations such as the Anjuman Sunnat-ul-Jamaat Association (ASJA) were set up in the 1930s, and the Islamic Missionary Guild in 1960. Muslims are mostly represented among the Indians of Guyana and Trinidad. They make up about 7% of the Guyanese population and 6% of Trinidad's.

### Basic tenets of Islam (known as The Five Pillars of Islam)

Shahadath – The belief that Allah (God) is the only god, and Muhammad is his messenger.

Salat – Muslims must pray five times a day.

Zakat – Muslims must give to those less fortunate than themselves.

Sawm – Muslims must fast during the month of Ramadan. Pregnant women, sick Muslims and children are exempted from this.

Hajj – A Muslim who can do so, must make a pilgrimage to Mecca at least once during his or her life.

A large number of Muslims in the Caribbean are also found in Jamaica, over 5,000 at present, though they make up less than 1% of the total population. Most of Jamaica's Muslims are of African descent, and their conversion has been influenced by US organizations such as the Nation of Islam (NOI). This organization, whose most famous member was Malcolm X, extended its influence in the Caribbean during the 1960s, when there were many social upheavals in the USA. The NOI's approach appealed because of its focus on social justice, racial pride and achieving prosperity for Africans.

### Hinduism

The first Hindus started arriving in the region as soon as emancipation was declared, in 1838. Apart from a brief suspension between 1848 and 1851, the indentured labourers from India were brought in steadily. However, you should note that Hinduism has many different branches, so Hindus have different rituals and beliefs. Once in the Caribbean, however, Hindus were forced to adapt many of their ancient practices, since it was difficult to keep certain traditions among a relatively small group in a new environment.

#### What does 'Hindu' mean?

The word was really invented by the Muslim conquerors, since the inhabitants of the sub-continent did not call themselves Hindu. The term, as well as the country's name (India), came from 'Sindhu', which was the name of the main river in the Indus valley, the cradle of India's 5,000-year-old civilization. Hindus in India do not usually identify themselves by reference to Hinduism, but by caste, village, region and language.

For example, in India, people were defined by their caste. There were four main castes. Brahmins had the highest status, and made up the noblemen, the religious leaders and the philosophers. Then there were kshatriyas, who were the soldiers and administrators. The third caste was the vaishyas, who were merchants, farmers and so on. In the lowest caste were the sudras, who were labourers. Within all these were even more sub-castes in India, which determined the kind of work an individual was allowed to do, their status in society and even who they could marry. Naturally, on the Caribbean sugar estates where everyone did the same hard labour, and where there was a shortage of women, keeping such distinctions was quite impractical.

The Indians managed to preserve their religion, with only a minority being persuaded by the Christian missionaries and the colonial authorities to convert. In the 1890s in Trinidad, the East Indian Association was formed to preserve Hindu traditions and to protect the



9.8 Hindus putting up flags (jhandi) in front of their homes upon completion of a worship session (puja)

rights of Indians. Several different Hindu groups also sprang up, but the most influential was the Sanatan Dharma Maha Sabha (SDMS), which was formed in the 1950s. At the same time, Hindus were assimilated in territories where there were relatively few of them, such as Jamaica and St Vincent.

Although Hinduism cannot be considered a unified or homogenous religion, certain concepts are more or less common to all branches. One of the most important is dharma, which may be translated as truth, duty, righteousness, law and justice. Another is moksha, which means liberation from the cycle of birth and death (reincarnation) which Hindus believe all people go through until they are spiritually advanced.

### Spiritual Baptists

This religion is a syncretism of Christianity and African doctrines, rites and rituals. Spiritual Baptists are found in large numbers in Trinidad, Barbados, St Vincent and Grenada. In the past, followers were referred to as ‘Shouter Baptists’ because of the loud clapping and singing associated with their prayer sessions. However, this term was used in a degrading manner and there has been a conscious attempt to use ‘Spiritual Baptists’ instead. In Trinidad, the Shouters Prohibition Ordinance was passed on 16 November 1917 by the colonial government. The government felt that the group disturbed the peace of the colony with its loud singing and clapping and, after numerous complaints by

prominent citizens, it banned the religion. Years later, on 26 January 1996, Prime Minister Basdeo Panday granted the Spiritual Baptists a public holiday on 30 March in commemoration of their struggles and in celebration of their religious beliefs.

The religion is characterized as follows.

- Baptism – those who wish to join the Spiritual Baptists will attend prayers sessions regularly and participate in worship in preparation for the day when he or she is baptised. Baptism is symbolic in that it represents an invitation to follow God and shows the person’s willingness to repent for all past sins and to lead a righteous life. During baptism, the person is immersed in water and this represents resurrection into a new life.
- Mourning – Spiritual Baptists’ periods of mourning entails prayer sessions and meditation. This is one aspect of African custom which they kept in their practices.
- Prayer sessions – these are very vibrant occasions undertaken with much ceremony. They are sessions where the Spiritual Baptists give thanks to God. During these sessions they light candles, offer flowers and fruit, bread and cakes, for example. The philosophical idea is that the more you give, the more you will get in return or the richer you will be spiritually.
- Pilgrimage – this provides an opportunity for Spiritual Baptists to meet each other and to assemble as a larger group.



## REVISION QUESTIONS

- 1** Read the passage below, then answer the questions that follow.

Rastafarians turned away from European customs. They believed in Africa and in black pride, and they worshipped Haile Selassie. Most Caribbean people viewed their lifestyle as different in the 1960s.

- a** Give three reasons why Rastafarians turned away from European customs. (9 marks)
- b** Give two reasons why Rastafarians worshipped Haile Selassie. (8 marks)
- c** Describe two features of the Rastafarian lifestyle that most Caribbean people saw as 'different' up to 1962. (8 marks)

(Total: 25 marks)

*CXC Past Paper, Basic Proficiency, May/June 2002*

- 2** Read the passage below and answer the questions that follow.

'I saw before me then, even as I do now, a new world of black men, not peons, serfs, dogs, and slaves, but a nation of sturdy men making their impress [mark] upon civilization and causing a new light to dawn upon the human race.'  
Marcus Garvey, quoted in Hall, 1982, pg 126.

- a** Explain why Marcus Garvey thought that the situation of blacks in Jamaica could be compared to that of peons, serfs and slaves. (10 marks)
- b** Describe four measures taken by Marcus Garvey to improve the social and economic conditions of blacks. (10 marks)
- c** Outline two ways in which individuals, groups or governments responded to Garvey and the Garvey movement. (5 marks)

(Total: 25 marks)

*CXC Past Paper, General Proficiency, May/June 2003*

- 3** Critically examine the reasons for the changes in the socio-economic positions of people in any one named Caribbean territory between 1950 and 1985. (25 marks)
- 4** 'African religions underwent various changes in the Caribbean during the period 1900 to 1985.' Do you agree? (25 marks)

## References and recommended reading

- Brereton, B. *Social Life in the Caribbean, 1838–1938*, London: Heinemann Educational Books, 1985
- Beckles, H. and Shepherd, V. *Freedoms Won: Caribbean emancipation, ethnicities and nationhood*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006
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- Slesin, S. *Caribbean Style*, New York: Clarkson Potter, 1998