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978-0-521-29491-1 - Urbanization and Urban Growth in the Caribbean: An Essay on Social Change in Dependent Societies

Malcolm Cross

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Urbanization in Developing Countries

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Preface

A recent review of a four volume compendium on the West Indies (Comitas and Lowenthal, 1973) complained that by limiting its purview to the non-Hispanic Caribbean it suffered from an all too common myopia (Lewis, 1974a). While there can be no doubt that clarity of vision will be better served by meticulous comparison across the major linguistic and cultural divisions in the Caribbean, the need is more clearly expressed than achieved. Indeed the present essay poses the problem with far more acuity than it delivers solutions. However, if it encourages others to undertake the primary research that is still largely conspicuous by its absence then it will be of some value.

Urbanization and urban growth are Janus faced phenomena, bringing the material comforts and cultural concentration of modern living for some but housing squalor, unemployment and discontent for others. It is the thesis of this brief volume that whereas some parts of the world may have the autonomy of action necessary to control the process, the Caribbean has usually been denied this power and independence. It is an area of the world whose history has made it peculiarly vulnerable to the effects of decisions made elsewhere. For the most part these decisions have instigated forces conducive to urban growth and rural decline; forces that are both material and cultural in nature. People have been prised from the land by the impossibility of making an adequate income and weaned from it by an education that has effectively denigrated agricultural employment. The cities and towns have been the nuclei of prestigious values and ways of life but because they themselves have been the acolytes of metropolitan centres, they have often lacked the wealth to fulfil the promise of the urban ideal. This book outlines some aspects of these economic forces and provides an overview of the main features of urban population growth. It then considers the implications and consequences of these processes for Caribbean societies and concludes by examining the responses of policy makers and planners.

In ten years of research on the Caribbean it is hard to identify with accuracy the parentage of one's ideas. I can only say that I have benefited greatly from many conversations with fellow students of the area. In particular David Nicholls and Asher Tropp have always provided wise counsel on parts of the region with which I am less familiar. However, I

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can blame no one but myself for whatever errors and absurdities this book may contain.

The University of Surrey provided the funds for a visit to the Caribbean in 1975 to collect material for this book which I am pleased to acknowledge. The series editor, Professor Kenneth Little, has shown tolerance and understanding in the face of an inordinately delayed completion and provided me with perceptive and constructive comments on the first draft. It is a pleasure to thank Marie Elmer and Maureen Etherington for producing an elegant typescript from my spidery hand with speed and accuracy. Finally, while I could not imagine life with the Griselda that most male authors evidently prefer, writing this book has taken many hours that my wife and I could have enjoyed together and for which a dedication seems a meagre recompense.

M.C.

Leatherhead

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**El hombre de tierra adentro
esta en un hoyo metido,
muerto sin haber nacido,
el hombre de tierra adentro.
Y el hombre de la ciudad,
ay Cuba, es un pordiosero;
anda hambriento y sin dinero,
pidiendo por caridad,
aunque se ponga sombrero
y baile en la sociedad.**

(Nicolás Guillén, 1947;
see note p. 155)

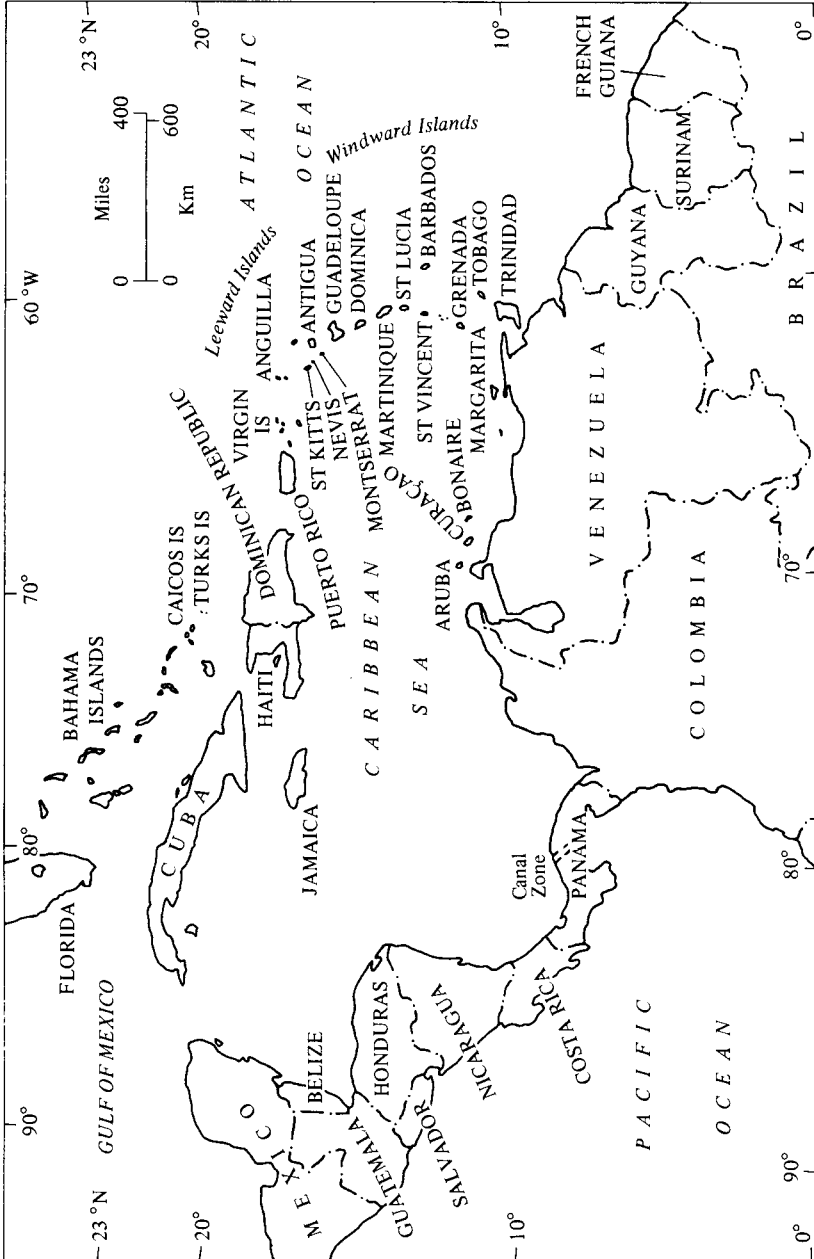
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Map of the Caribbean (based on an original by Colin Clarke)