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A Concise History of the Caribbean

A Concise History of the Caribbean presents a general history of the Caribbean islands from the beginning of human settlement about seven thousand years ago to the present. It narrates processes of early human migration, the disastrous consequences of European colonization, the development of slavery and the slave trade, the extraordinary profits earned by the plantation economy, the great revolution in Haiti, movements toward political independence, the Cuban Revolution, and the diaspora of Caribbean people. Written in a lively and accessible style yet current with the most recent research, the book provides a compelling narrative of Caribbean history essential for students and visitors.

B. W. Higman is the William Keith Hancock Professor of History at the Australian National University and Professor Emeritus of the University of the West Indies. He is the author of ten books on Caribbean history, archaeology, and geography, including *Slave Population and Economy in Jamaica, 1807–1834* (1976, Cambridge; awarded the Bancroft Prize), *Plantation Jamaica 1750–1850: Capital and Control in a Colonial Economy* (2005), and *Jamaican Food: History, Biology, Culture* (2008).

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PREFACE

Any history leaves out much that might interest individual readers. The history of the Caribbean has its special difficulties, particularly because of the large number of states, polities, and islands in the region, all of them with their own individual as well as shared histories. I have simplified my task by dealing strictly with the islands and ignoring the surrounding rimland and the outliers – notably Belize, Guyana, Suriname and French Guyana, which are often included in general histories – except when these continental places connect directly with the experience of the islands. The definition of the extent of the rimland or hinterland, making up what has come to be known as the Caribbean Basin, is problematic. Including the peoples living in all these countries can greatly distort the demography, multiplying the population by as much as four times that of the islands. Another large region is sometimes defined as the Greater Caribbean or the extended Caribbean, stretching through the coastal and insular territories all the way from Virginia in the north to Bahia, the easternmost part of Brazil, in the south. These larger regional conceptions have validity for some periods and patterns of development but not for all. Confining the narrative to the islands sets limits but at the same time provides an ecological coherence that enables an attempt to write a systematic comparative history.

Seen in the context of this broader perspective, my own research projects over the years seem incredibly limited. I have therefore depended heavily for knowledge and insight on the labours of colleagues past and present and I thank them all for making it possible

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Preface

for me to construct my own interpretation and reading of their work. The book was written in the History Program of the Research School of Social Sciences, at the Australian National University. The maps were prepared by Kay Dancey.

Dates for years provided as BP are Before the Present; AD signifies the common modern calendar. Populations provided for the year 2010 are based on projections, the best estimates available at the beginning of that year.

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