

A CONCISE HISTORY OF THE CARIBBEAN

A Concise History of the Caribbean offers a comprehensive interpretation of the history of the Caribbean islands from the beginning of human settlement 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 towards political independence, the Cuban Revolution, and the diaspora of Caribbean people. In this second edition, Higman covers the political, social, and environmental developments of the last decade, offering sections on insular politics, Cuban communism, earthquakes, hurricanes, climate change, resource ecologies, epidemics, identity and reparations. 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 Professor Emeritus at the Australian National University and Professor Emeritus of the University of the West Indies, where he studied and taught for thirty years. His numerous books include *Slave Population and Economy in Jamaica 1807–1834*, which was awarded the Bancroft Prize.

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SECOND EDITION

B. W. HIGMAN



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PREFACE TO THE FIRST EDITION

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.

Preface to the First Edition

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 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.

PREFACE TO THE SECOND EDITION

For this new edition, I have sought not only to update the narrative but also to direct attention to contemporary challenges such as climate change, environmental degradation, epidemic disease, and questions of identity and sovereignty. These challenges are essentially global, but have particular significance for the islands of the Caribbean in the twenty-first century. In order to make space for these issues, I have reduced somewhat the narrative in the first six chapters. Chapter 7 now covers the period 1940–2000, and includes a new section on World War II. The first edition concluded with a chapter titled ‘Canoe, Caravel, Container Ship’, offering a perspective on the major periods of Caribbean history seen through the lens of maritime technologies. This is replaced by a chapter covering the period 2000–2020 with a focus on the changing climate – literal and metaphorical – as represented in environmental challenges, natural disasters, political allegiances, and demands for reparations. For help in thinking through these issues, and for their generous guidance and support, I thank particularly Laurence Brown, Sienna Brown, Tania Colwell, Norma Harrack, Howard Johnson, Alexandra Lord, John Mayo, Kathleen Monteith and Carlos Eduardo Morreo. The text was prepared in the School of History, Research School of Social Sciences, at the Australian National University.

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