

Bony Carter

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Caribbean Seeks Way to Give Islanders Share in Tourism Benefits

By JON NORDHEIMER

The English-speaking islands of the Caribbean, those volcanic and coral outcroppings of rock upon which flags of independence have been planted in recent years, are being moved by events to a new political and economic era.

duced a new language of realism that strips away the travel brochure image of the Caribbean as a sunny playground for North Americans and calls for liberation from outside money interests through a combination of economic pluralism and political pragmatism.

A variety of pressures are forcing a review of the neocolonial aspects of tourism.

Coinciding with rising self-awareness are external pressures toward greater cohesion, such as the widely anticipated economic withdrawal of England from the hemisphere and the opening

Caribbean governments search for a formula that will enable the native West Indians to share more fully in the economic benefits derived from the massive influx of tourists.

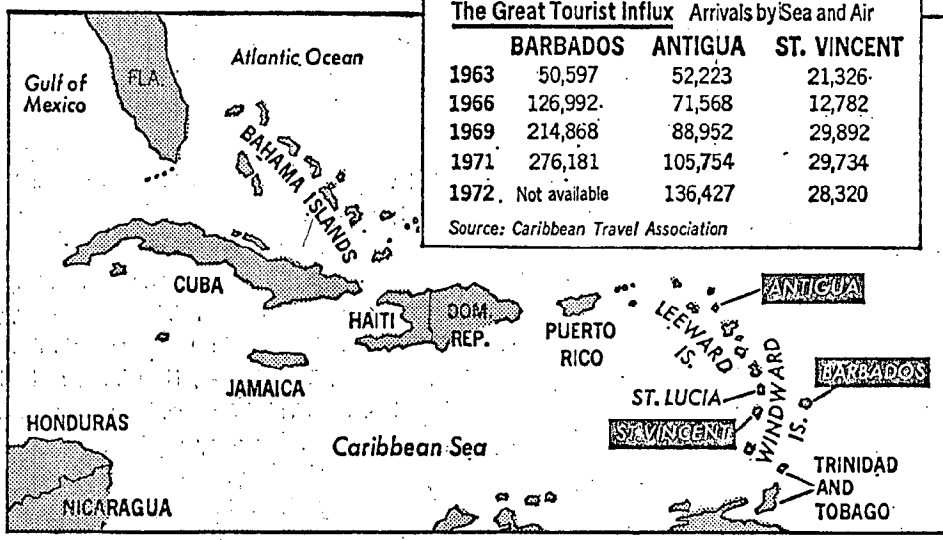
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This reassessment has pro-

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MARCH 13TH—GRAND OPENING BARCO STORE #4-10 EAST 45TH STREET. Advt.



Rising self-awareness and economic changes push the Caribbean islands into a new era

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Caribbean Seeks to Spread the Benefits of Tourism

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of a new period of inter-Caribbean diplomatic relations with Cuba.

Indeed, Castroism has fostered no more anti-American emotion in the Caribbean than tourism, some regional analysts believe, and may actually create less political unrest in the future. What is needed they say, is not ideology but native leadership with the competence to turn the tourism phenomenon into a force that serves the island's people.

But to make this idea concrete is a problem. England's entry into the European Common Market has raised serious doubts whether she can continue to protect imports from former colonies beyond short-term agreements. And any movement toward a common Caribbean identity must take account of sharply contrasting stages of development.

The Leeward Islands, for example, tend to be more conservative and less developed than the Windward Islands. The somnolent British Virgin Islands, still a colony, are about as far removed from independent Trinidad, where a struggle between native blacks and brown East Indians crackles with tension, as American Samoa is from New York City. Oil refinery workers in Aruba earn wages that provide a fair living, while women working in an American-owned plant on St. Lucia make 15 cents an hour.

"We are very similar and very different at the same time," said one Caribbean political leader. "We have a sense of union only when we get together outside of the Caribbean. Take, for example, the camaraderie in the West Indian clubs of New York City. The difference between a Jamaican and a Barbadian is about the same as between a New Yorker and a Texan. Get the Texan to speak about the New Yorker and you would think they are from foreign countries. Let them meet in a Paris bistro and suddenly their arms are around each other and they are both Americans."

The Barbadian's grasp of white ways and his studied attachment to the work ethic are commented on in Calypso lyrics, the topical news service of the Caribbean.

"The Trinidadian looks upon the Barbadian as staid and joyless, a man who postpones gratification for material success," observed Dr. Anthony P. Maingot, a native of Trinidad who teaches at the University of Miami.

Such basic divisions of character, while no more accurate individually than any stereotype, nonetheless indicate the barriers in the way of any Caribbean political union, Dr. Maingot said.

A Base Market Established

Still, common threads do exist. A Caribbean trade association, CARIFTA, was formed several years ago, and while it has not yet succeeded in persuading West Indians to buy native goods and feedstuffs, it has estab-



The New York Times/Jon Nordheimer

Peasant children in St. Vincent, W. I. The choices for their future lives have barely changed with the emergence of tourism. Because of the scarcity of economic opportunities, perhaps half the adults leave the islands.

Indian authorities are the first to acknowledge, could make more than a minimal change in a dismal economic predicament that even the colonialists, with an abundance of cheap labor and plenty of markets, could never solve.

The trouble was that as the sugar cane market in the Caribbean declined throughout this century, one after another of the islands became instantly overpopulated, since in most cases more than 90 per cent of the inhabitants were descendants of African slaves imported to grow and harvest sugar. Independence simply replaced serfdom with shabby freedom.

So the economies of most of the islands became dependent on their only other natural resources—the beauty, charm and serenity of the Horse Latitudes. First by cruise ship and then by jumbo jet, tourists "discovered" the West Indies, which, until World War II, had been traversed mostly by wealthy yachtsmen or adventuresome teachers.

While tourism enriched hotel chains and white entrepreneurs, it had little perceptible impact on the natives other than to send up the cost of living—clothing, streets that were once picturesque, and perpetuate the colonial myth that all white people were rich, superior, and impervious to the culture of the islanders.

From the monoculture of sugar the region had moved into the monoculture of tourism, and political independence provided, in many cases, nothing more substantive than the patina of humanitarianism. The alternatives of

under 10 per cent, which is a very low level for the Caribbean, where in some places half the population cannot find jobs. Illiteracy is confined to about 2 per cent of the population, and the population growth rate has been reduced to zero, according to Peter Morgan, a white member of parliament.

Mr. Morgan, elected from a district that is 95 per cent black, also serves as minister of tourism, and in an interview he explained that 60 per cent of the island's hotels and transportation services were owned by the natives, a circumstance, he said, that has spared the island the kind of racial tension that has been experienced elsewhere in the Caribbean.

Moreover, to give the islanders an even greater stake in tourism and make them more conscious of its benefits, the government has under consideration a plan to offer tax-free certificates in hotel enterprises, and to provide incentive loans of \$2,500 to local businessmen to invest in tourist-oriented operations.

"We do not yet have any racial hostility," Mr. Morgan explained, "but one can't say it'll always remain that way."

Another policy of the black-dominated government that averts tension is the "open beaches" rule, which guarantees natives access to the island's best beaches. As natural and logical as the policy might appear, it is not the procedure on other islands, where beaches have been fenced off for the exclusive use of white tourists.

Perhaps the main buttress of stability is long experience with self-rule in Barbados, which took the first step

little contact is made with the natives outside of the garden helpers and serving girls.

Twenty-five years ago a native received basic pay of 72 cents a week—12 cents for a 12-hour day, six days a week—and he could expect a lashing if he failed to report for work. By comparison, today's wages (for hotel maids) of \$11 a week seem good and working conditions seem more humane, but the quality of life for the islander has changed very little.

Now German and British investors are planning huge new tourist complexes that could send the number of hotel rooms on the island from 5,000 to 18,000 within five years, and no one dares predict what impact that will have on the natives. The only thing that is certain is they will have little choice in the direction of the economy.

Those who make these decisions are men like Dr. Wayne Waterman, a retired plastic surgeon from Brooklyn who owns two hotels and a nightclub on Antigua, and who said recently, that his major concern on the island was protecting his investments.

"This talk of political union in the Caribbean is nonsense," Dr. Waterman said. "Black people never have gotten along with each other and never will. Perhaps it's an inherited trait. It all goes back to tribal warfare. Even on this small island it's difficult for a man from one small village to get along with a man from another village."

ST. VINCENT

On St. Vincent, where the Green Crater Lake in the Soufriere volcano is still warm and sulphurous from recent eruption, workers at the government-owned farmers' cooperative market on the wharf at Kingstown earn only \$1.50 a day in wages.

And yet the island is in the process of a radical attempt at change under the leadership of Premier James E. Mitchell, a compromise choice whose ideas may shape the future of the island despite his meager political base of support.

Mr. Mitchell who is also Premier of the neighboring Grenadines, has embarked on a sweeping land reform program intended to break up the old estates left intact from the days of colonial rule.

But perhaps more radical yet is the new attitude toward tourism in the government, which has "associated state" status in the British Commonwealth—that is, it has domestic autonomy while England continues to handle its foreign affairs and defense.

"To Hell With Paradise," is the title of a speech given

around the Caribbean in the last year by Mr. Mitchell, an intense, tall man with Scotch, Irish and African blood.

In the speech, Mr. Mitchell attacks the myth of the "Caribbean Paradise" sold daily across counters in travel agencies and airline offices in New York, Toronto and London.

"Let us face it, there is no paradise, only different ways of life," Mr. Mitchell declares. "Not that paradise has been lost, or destroyed, but that it never existed. The North American trying to escape a big city problem like air pollution may not recognize the West Indian's problem of lack of opportunity in a small island. But it is a problem just the same."

In an interview, Mr. Mitchell said he wondered what the impact on the island would be if uncontrolled mass tourism, which is slowly moving down the archipelago in his direction, swept over St. Vincent.

"We should think in terms of developing as a human resource and not just as an exclusive enclave," he said as he stood on the brow of a soft ridge overlooking the harbor at Kingstown.

"We don't want people who want to get away from it all. If people come here we want them to be prepared to share and get involved. Therefore, we limit the size of property that foreigners can buy. Estates are not a glorious contribution to our country. They simply take productive land out of agriculture and drive prices up. A native can't afford these large homes, and he wonders why the hell someone could use 2,000 acres for a house only used three weeks out of the year.

"We insist that if a foreigner buys land he must build on it within three years. That deals with the problem of land speculators."

The government here has also provided incentives for local ownership of small guest hotels while withholding them for foreign-owned hotel chains, contrary to the trend in more developed islands.

"The tourism market constitutes several hundred million peoples," he reflected, "but we are not interested in appealing to one hundred million people. We aspire to increase our hotel capacity at a pace that will not prove discontinuous, not one that creates a sudden burst of investment that shocks everybody and creates sociological difficulties."

"The visitor is therefore not imposed on the local community. He is a guest. A great deal of conflict is avoided if we recognize this and seek to develop this part."

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A Base Market Established

Still, common threads do exist. A Caribbean trade association, CARIFTA, was formed several years ago, and while it has not yet succeeded in persuading West Indians to buy native goods and foodstuffs, it has established a base market that many hope will eventually wean the region from foreign money and merchandise.

And throughout the islands, the coming of independence and the emergence of native leadership has awakened and often expressed feeling of regional responsibility and a desire, despite great differences, to work out problems together.

Political cooperation was manifest, for example, in the recognition last December of Cuba by Jamaica, Barbados, and Trinidad and Tobago. "When Cuba indicated it would take an interest in spreading its experience in sugar cane and other economic areas, then we took an interest in establishing relations," said Branford Tait, minister of trade in Barbados.

"We recognize the Soviet Union," the 34-year-old official continued, "why not a fellow Caribbean country where thousands of exile Barbadians live and work? We are not Communists. We are not convinced that Communism is the best system. For that matter I am not personally convinced that capitalism is the best system for us. We just don't have the resources for capitalism."

Indeed, most of the islands apparently do not have resources sufficient for Marxism is the best system. model in Cuba, one of the richest of the Caribbean islands in resources and technological experience, has still not found economic sufficiency despite massive Soviet aid.

What is developing as a viable economic force is the style of Socialism found in Barbados and most of the other independent islands, a system of extensive government husbandry of limited resources with provision for a degree of private enterprise.

Militant Rhetoric Cools

Meanwhile, the black power rhetoric that swept several islands in recent years, though it can still be heard in some places, no longer has the same disruptive fervor. There seems to be a growing recognition that just as the newly won political power did not automatically create economic power, neither would harsh talk or violence.

For no amount of independence or pride in a flag, West

natural resources—the beauty, charm and serenity of the Horse Latitudes. First by cruise ship and then by jumbo jet, tourists "discovered" the West Indies, which, until World War II, had been traversed mostly by wealthy yachtsmen or adventuresome teachers.

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Dollar Crisis a Factor

The dollar crisis has complicated the region's economic problems even further. "Americans know that the dollar won't go as far today in the Caribbean, where prices were already generally high," one analyst said. Even before the recent devaluation of the dollar, the Caribbean was experiencing a relatively depressed tourism season, he said.

In a sense, the scarcity of opportunity has turned the West Indian into the economic exile of the hemisphere. Perhaps half of the adult population of the islands must eventually leave home in search of labor — there are no reliable figures available. And at Christmas and during the midsummer carnivals, when the exiles journey home, the joy of reunion is mixed with sadness.

In fact, on many islands the "remittance" — the money sent home by the exile to his family—is a significant portion of the economy.

"Probably 100,000 Barbadians live and work in the United States, most on the Eastern Seaboard," said Mr. Tait. "If West Indian nurses ever stop working in New York City the hospitals there would have to shut down. We have more Barbadian nationals living off the island than on it."

For a cross-section view of how all of these problems and changes are affecting individual islands, there are three that are roughly representative of the different stages of development in the Caribbean—Barbados, Antigua and St. Vincent, all former Crown colonies situated in the archipelago that curves like a bow from the Bahamas to the coast of South America.

BARBADOS

Barbados, with a population of 242,000, perhaps comes closer than any other island in the eastern Caribbean to being a success story. The island, considered the most Anglophile of the former colonies, has the third oldest parliament in the world (formed in 1639, after London's and Bermuda's). It is a staid, stable place that appears to be closing in on most of its severe problems while fostering tourism on its own terms.

Unemployment is reported to have been brought down

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Perhaps the main buttress of stability is long experience with self-rule in Barbados, which took the first step in 1951 to reach full independence in 1966.

"Black people in Barbados don't see themselves as inferior," said Mr. Tait, the son of a black laborer, "because black people run the show. Most of the people in the decision-making process in the bureaucracy and the labor unions came up much like I did. They had a thirst for education and realized that qualifications were needed for the job."

Still, the confidence expressed by leaders like Mr. Tait and Mr. Morgan is subject to the vagaries of the region's tentative economics. Barbados, for example, could be thrust into economic jeopardy if British sugar subsidies are abandoned because of pressure from other nations in the Common Market, particularly the French, who have expressed a desire to protect continental sugar beet interests.

Caribbean sugar growers were told last week that London would give the subsidy every consideration—"prendre a coeur" was the phrase used—but there is anxiety in Barbados and elsewhere in the Caribbean that a curtailment of the subsidies would bring economic chaos to the region.

ANTIGUA

With sugar cane rotting in open fields because the market price does not make it worth harvesting, some 40 per cent of the natives of Antigua, are unemployed. The only resource available to the beautiful island, with its 75,000 natives, is tourism, which is mostly seasonal.

A new government made up of young aggressive black men took over in 1970 from a docile black regime that had governed the island since World War II. The new men have new ideas and talent but few dollars to exploit them.

British tradition is still strong there, and judges and members of parliament continue to wear the black robes and wigs of Westminster. But the tourist influence is resolutely American.

Fat American yachts that are worth almost the total annual Antiguan budget float at anchor in the harbor at St. John, and a colony of millionaires sequester themselves in luxury in a development called Mill Reef, where

Premier of the neighboring Grenedines, has embarked on a sweeping land reform program intended to break up the old estates left intact from the days of colonial rule.

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