

## Reinterpreting the Caribbean

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### Definition

What constitutes the Caribbean? The answer is often a matter of perspective and of context. Anglophones in the region usually speak and think of the Caribbean as meaning the English-speaking islands, or the member states of the Caribbean Community (Caricom). Sometimes the phrase “the wider Caribbean” is employed to refer to what is, in effect, “the others”. In the Hispanic literature *El Caribe* refers either to the Spanish-speaking islands only, or to *Las Antillas*—the entire islands chain. More recently a distinction is being made between *El Caribe insular*—the islands—and *El Gran Caribe*—the Greater Caribbean, or entire basin. Among scholars, “the Caribbean” is a socio-historical category, commonly referring to a cultural zone characterised by the legacy of slavery and the plantation system. It embraces the islands and parts of the adjoining mainland—and may be extended to include the Caribbean Diaspora overseas. As one scholar observes, there are many Caribbeans<sup>1</sup>.

This is reflected at the level of regional organisations. Caricom is primarily an Anglophone grouping, recently expanded to include Suriname and in principle Haiti. Cariforum, which groups the Caribbean signatories to the Lome Convention, includes Caricom, Haiti and the Dominican Republic. The Association of Caribbean States (ACS) embraces the entire basin. The majority of the dependent territories in the Caribbean do not belong to Caricom, Cariforum or the ACS; but most are members of the Caribbean Development and Co-operation Committee (CDCC) of ECLAC. The CDCC excludes the majority of the basin states; its membership corresponds roughly to that of the insular Caribbean.

In short the definition of the Caribbean might be based on language and identity, geography, history and culture, geopolitics, geoeconomics, or organisation. The term itself has an interesting history. It originated with the desire of the Spanish invaders to demonise those groups of the earlier inhabitants that chose to resist them. *Los Caribes* were allegedly the man-eaters (after the Spanish *carne*, for meat), and therefore deserving of no mercy. Gaztambide-Geigel (1996: 76, 83) has shown that the derivative name only began to be applied to the entire region towards the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, in the context of US expansion of its “southern frontier”. Later expressions of this were the Anglo-American Caribbean Commission (later simply the Caribbean Commission) of 1942 and Reagan’s Caribbean Basin Initiative of the 1980s. Both the name itself and its later application to a geographical zone were inventions of imperial powers.

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<sup>1</sup> Gaztambide-Geigel 1996: 84

**Table 1. Many Caribbeans**

<b>Name</b>	<b>Scope</b>	<b>Characterisation</b>	<b>Institutions</b>
Caribbean Basin (US)	Mainland & islands	Geo-political/hegemonic	CBI
Greater Caribbean 1 (“El Gran Caribe”)	Mainland & islands	Geo-economic/co-operative	ACS
Greater Caribbean 2 (“El Gran Caribe”)	Mainland & islands	Geo-social/counter-hegemonic	CRIES, Civil Forum
Plantation Caribbean or “African Central America”	Islands, the three Guianas, and “Caribbean” /black communities on the mainland	Ethno-historic/counter-hegemonic	CSA
Insular or Island Caribbean	Islands, the three Guianas and Belize	Ethno-historic	CDCC, ACE, CPDC
Caribbean of CARICOM	Anglophone states, Suriname, Monsterrat	Economic co-operative, strong cultural & linguistic ties	CARICOM
Caribbean of ACP	CARICOM, Dominican Republic, Haiti	Neo-colonial/negotiation, in transition	CARIFORUM

**Notes.**

ACE	Association of Caribbean Economists
ACP	African, Caribbean and Pacific Group of countries signatories to the Lome Convention with the European Union (EU).
CARICOM	Caribbean Community. Members are 13 Anglophone states, Suriname, and Montserrat, a British dependent territory. Haiti has been admitted in principle but the formalities have not yet been completed.
CARIFORUM	Caribbean members of the ACP Group. Members are CARICOM, the Dominican Republic and Haiti
ACS	Association of Caribbean States. Members are all states of the Greater Caribbean plus three French dependencies (non-ratified associate members).
CBI	Caribbean Basin Initiative
CDCC	Caribbean Development and Co-operation Committee of ECLAC, the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean. Members are all states of the insular Caribbean only, plus the Dutch and US dependent territories and three British dependent territories.
Civil Forum	Forum of Civil Society of the Greater Caribbean
CPDC	Caribbean Policy Development Centre, an umbrella grouping of NGOs of the insular Caribbean
CRIES	Regional Coordination of Economic and Social Research, a network of research centres linked with NGOs
CSA	Caribbean Studies Association

What is significant is the subsequent *re-invention* of the concept of Caribbean by native scholars as expressions of intellectual and political resistance. This was especially notable in the case of the New World Group, which emerged in the Anglophone Caribbean in the 1960s. Drawing on the insights of the American anthropologist Charles Wagley and building on the earlier work of the radical nationalists C.L.R. James (1938)<sup>2</sup> and Eric Williams (1944, 1970)<sup>3</sup>, the group articulated a vision of the Caribbean as an integral part of “Plantation America”. Similarities of history and culture were held to outweigh differences in language or colonial power. In the words of Best

Certainly (the Caribbean) includes the Antilles—Greater and Lesser—and the Guianas... But many times the Caribbean also includes the littoral that surrounds our sea... what we are trying to encompass within our scheme is the cultural, social, political and economic foundation of the “sugar plantation” variant of the colonial mind (Best 1971: 7)<sup>4</sup>.

For Best, this definition was the foundational step in establishing the link between intellectual thought and Caribbean freedom. Striking parallels exist in the positions taken by the Haitian anthropologist Jean Casimir (1991:75-77) and the Puerto Rican historian Gaztambide-Geigel (1996: 90-92). The latter regards the Caribbean as constituting *Afro-America Central* (“Central Afro-America”); and calls this as the *ethno-historic conception* of the region.

Yet the counter-hegemonic concept of Caribbean is not limited to the ethno-historic perspective. The “basin” perspective of the hegemonic power has been inverted by some as a sphere of resistance. This vision, which Gaztambide-Geigel characterises as *Tercermundista* (“Thirdworldist”) dates back at least to the 1940s and has been articulated by elites in Mexico, Colombia and Venezuela, the so-called “G3” countries. In contemporary times it finds expression in the ACS and in the Civil Society Forum of the Greater Caribbean, an NGO grouping. However these organisations emphasise co-operation in furtherance of common interests as their objective; any counter-hegemonic aspirations, if they are present, are muted rather than explicit.

Hence the notion of Caribbean has been, and is being, continuously re-defined and re-interpreted in response to external influences and to internal currents. A plausible

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<sup>2</sup> James’s book on the Haitian revolution, *The Black Jacobins*, was reissued in 1962 with a new appendix called “From Toussaint L’Ouverture to Fidel Castro”. It has gone through many editions, has been published in French and Italian, and strongly influenced the consciousness of several generations of Anglophone Caribbean intellectuals.

<sup>3</sup> Williams, a Trinidadian historian who later led the nationalist movement and became the first Prime Minister of Trinidad and Tobago, analysed the connection between slavery, the slave trade and the rise of British industrial capitalism. He worked for the Caribbean Commission in Puerto Rico before entering Trinidadian politics. In 1970, the same year that Williams’s *From Columbus to Castro* came out, the Dominican Republic nationalist leader Juan Bosch published a book in Spanish with a virtually identical name (Bosch 1983; 1<sup>st</sup> ed. 1970)

<sup>4</sup> Originally published in 1967. The same passage makes clear that Best’s conception of the Caribbean stretched as far as Recife in Brazil and the Carolinas in the United States. See also Beckford’s classic *Persistent Poverty* (Beckford 1972)

position is that there is no one “correct” definition: content depends on context, but it should be clearly specified whenever used for descriptive or analytical purposes (see for instance Table 1). Conceptually, we find it useful to distinguish just the two variants of the *insular Caribbean* (a socio-historical rather than geographic category since includes the islands, the three Guianas and Belize); and the *Greater Caribbean* (the entire basin). Organisationally, it is necessary to distinguish the Caribbean of *Caricom*, of *Cariforum*, and of the ACS. Culturally, the growing importance of the *Diaspora* of the insular Caribbean in North America and Europe has to be recognised. The Caribbean is not only multilingual, it has also become transnational.

### **Identity**

A parallel ambiguity arises regarding the existence of a common Caribbean “identity”. Certainly the inhabitants of the region have been ambivalent about accepting a definition that was originally imposed from without and is still today very much an intellectual or political creation. Central Americans have always preferred to identify themselves as belonging to “the Isthmus” and to call their Eastern Coast “the Atlantic”. In the Hispanic islands, the nationalist current identified itself with Latin America on cultural, linguistic and historical grounds. Self-definition as “Caribbean” was problematic insofar as it connoted a denial of their Hispanic identity historically associated with US expansionism. It also meant being grouped with islands that were non-Hispanic, still under colonial rule and overwhelmingly black. As recently as 1987 a leading Puerto Rican writer was asserting:

“For us Puerto Ricans the term *antillean* has clear significance, but not the terms *Caribbean* or *Caribbeanness*. The former makes us part of the historical and cultural experience of the Greater Antilles, the latter... imposes on us a suprahistorical category, an invented object of a sociological, anthropological and ethnological character that is anglophone in origin, and that functions against the colonized person, as Fanon pointed out”. (Rodriguez Julio 1988).

Fidel Castro must have been acutely aware of the divisiveness and implicitly ethnic orientation of this current when he declared in 1976 that Cuba is a “Latin African” rather than Latin American nation, and more recently when he asserted that “the Caribbean people of African origin are a part of Our America” (Castro 1999).

An analogous ambivalence is evident among the non-Hispanics. Up to the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> century the majority of these islands remained simply “The West Indies” or “The Antilles”—British, French, and Dutch—and their inhabitants were known as West Indians or Antilleans. Haiti, which had been isolated since its Independence a century earlier, was African, Francophone, and uniquely Haitian. It was not until the 1940s that “the Caribbean” began to acquire some currency in the European West Indian colonies. This was originally as a result of the activities of the (Anglo-American) Caribbean Commission and subsequently that of the work of regional historians and social scientists.

For Anglophones, the terminological transition was signaled when the ill-fated *West Indies* Federation of the 1950s was replaced by the *Caribbean* Free Trade Association (CARIFTA) of the 1960s and the Caribbean Community (CARICOM) and the Caribbean Development Bank of the 1970s. The first two were, however, founded as exclusively Anglophone clubs. Anglophones still display a certain discomfort with the expansive definition of the region: they guard their “West Indian” identity jealously and appear to fear domination by the more populous Hispanic counties. This was reflected in the name, and the Report, of the Independent West Indian Commission, set up by the Caricom Heads of Government of 1992. The Commission recommended that Caricom’s integration efforts should be deepened rather than widened; the objective of widening regional co-operation would be pursued through the formation of the ACS, a looser form of association (WICOM 1992).

It might be said that Hispanics tend to see themselves as Caribbean and *Latin American* , Anglophones as Caribbean and *West Indian* . “West Indian” might also incorporate elements of pan-Africanism or pan-Hinduism that are either weak or non-existent in the Hispanic societies. Identity may overlap in name but may be in contradiction in content. The process of forming a common Caribbean psycho-cultural identity that transcends barriers of language and ethnicity is at best slow and uneven.

For their part the Dutch islands still call themselves “Antilles” although they have joined several Caribbean regional organisations. The French territories have the status of Overseas Departments of the French Republic and their inhabitants are French citizens. Here, self-definition as “Caribbean” is still relatively rare and when used, might connote an assertion of distinct cultural identity and perhaps a demand for greater autonomy.

In what follows we examine the principal socio-economic characteristics of the Greater Caribbean and the insular Caribbean.

### **Socio-economic characteristics**

Within the countries of the Greater Caribbean there are wide disparities in size, population, and per capita income, (see Annex Table 1 for detailed data). The grouping is dominated by the G3 countries, which together account for between two-thirds and three-quarters of the total population, GDP and land area (Table 2): Mexico alone with 90 million people has a greater population than all the other countries combined and 46 percent of the aggregate GDP. Colombia’s population is about equal to that of entire insular Caribbean with a GDP that exceeds that of the 16 independent states. Venezuela has over three times the population and four times the GDP of the whole of Caricom. Per capita income in the G3 is also higher than that of Central America and the non-Caricom insular states and slightly below that of Caricom. Given the wide disparities in size between the G3 and the rest, it is understandable that they should be regarded as “Latin American powers in the Caribbean” with the potential to be significant economic and political players in the region.

**Table 2. Greater Caribbean: major country groups**

	Per Capita GDP US\$	Share in:- Population	GDP	Land Area
G3	2,713	68	73	77
Isthmus	1,447	15	8	9
Insular Caribbean	2,759	17	18	14

*Note:* Insular Caribbean includes Belize, Guyana, Suriname, and French Guiana. GDP per capita are averages weighted by population.

Source Based on Annex Table 1

The balance of the regional population is divided fairly evenly between the Isthmus states and the insular Caribbean. As a group, the Isthmus states are the poorest in the region, with an average per capita income is only about half that of the G3 and of Caricom. There are wide income disparities among countries, Costa Rica and Panama having income levels 4-5 times the level in Nicaragua and Honduras. The last two are among the poorest countries in the hemisphere.

The insular Caribbean has a higher per capita income than that of the Greater Caribbean as a whole. Within this group, there are wide income disparities between the non-Caricom and the Caricom states, among Caricom states, and between the independent states and the dependent territories. These income differentials are associated with size, location and political status. The next section discusses these and other socio-economic characteristics of the insular Caribbean in greater detail.

### **The insular Caribbean**

The insular Caribbean is an extremely fragmented and heterogeneous sub-region. With just 37 million people it contains 28 distinct political entities and these vary widely with respect to size, political status, income and language. 22 have populations of under 1 million and these include 11 independent states. 14 of the 16 independent states attained sovereignty only in the past 40 years<sup>5</sup>, some as recently as the 1980s. Their political systems vary from multi-party parliamentary democracies in most of the Anglophone countries to Executive Presidential systems in several and the one-party popular democracy of Cuba.

The dependent territories belong to four metropolitan powers. Constitutional arrangements range from virtually full internal autonomy, as in Puerto Rico and the Netherlands Antilles; to the sharing of responsibility between locally elected administrations and the metropolitan authorities, as in the British and French dependencies. There are at least 6 official languages<sup>6</sup> and several local Creoles are also spoken. Here there is a paradox: although the majority of Caribbean entities are English speaking, the majority of the population is Spanish speaking; with French being second in importance. The chart below shows the distribution of population by language.

(CHART 1 GOES ABOUT HERE)

<sup>5</sup> This includes Cuba, whose official date of independence is January 1, 1959.

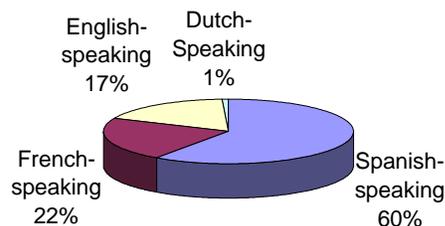
<sup>6</sup> Spanish, French, English, Dutch, Haitian Creole and the Creole of the Netherlands Antilles.

In analysing socio-economic characteristics, we have found it useful to distinguish four subgroups that combine the attributes of political status, size, and location, while ignoring distinctions of language, political system and regional association. The subgroups are:

- (i) *Larger Island States*: four states in the Greater Antilles containing three-quarters of the population, with an average population of nearly 7 million. These are Cuba, the Dominican Republic, Haiti, and Jamaica;
- (ii) *Smaller island states*: nine states, mostly in the eastern and southern Caribbean with populations under 1.5 million each and an average population size of 260,000. These are Trinidad and Tobago, Barbados, the Bahamas and the six members of the Organisation of Eastern Caribbean States;
- (iii) *Mainland states* : Suriname, Guyana, and Belize; and
- (iv) *Dependent territories* , which number 12 in all.

Summary information on the subgroups are provided in table 3, with additional details on human development and poverty in table 4.

**Chart 1. The Caribbean: language**



#### *Larger island states*

The group of four island states with 75 percent of the sub-region's population has relatively low per capita incomes and modest levels of human development. It includes Haiti, one of the poorest countries in the world with very low human development<sup>7</sup>. Cuba, the Dominican Republic and Jamaica are all in the \$1,000-2,000 range of per capita income. Cuba has done best in terms of level of human development compared to level of per capita income<sup>8</sup>, followed by Jamaica. The incidence of poverty is very high in Haiti, where two-thirds of the population live below the poverty line; and significant in Jamaica and the Dominican Republic where one-third and one-fifth of the population respectively are estimated to be in absolute poverty. In Cuba one-sixth of the urban population is estimated to be at risk of being unable access their basic needs requirements.

<sup>7</sup> Haiti was ranked 159<sup>th</sup> in the world HDI tables in 1998. It has slipped 34 places in ranking since 1991.

<sup>8</sup> This is measured by the difference between the country's GDP per capita rank and its HDI rank. For Cuba this was 18 in 1998, for Jamaica 9, for the Dominican Republic 1.

**Table 3. Insular Caribbean: GDP, Population and Land Area**

	Per Capita GDP 1995 (1)	Percent total		
		GDP	Population	Land Area
<b>Larger Island States</b>	1,101	30.3	75.9	27.6
<b>Smaller Island States</b>	5,215	12.0	6.4	3.0
<b>Mainland</b>	1,174	1.6	3.8	55.0
<b>Dependent territories</b>	11,099	56.1	13.9	14.4
<b>Total</b>	2,759	100.0	100.0	100.0
<b>Memo note: Caricom</b>	2,923	18.0	17.0	59.6
<b>Non-Caricom states</b>	1,036	25.0	69.1	26.0

(1) Weighted averages

**Table 4. Insular Caribbean: Human Development, Growth and Poverty**

	GDP Per Capita 1995 US\$		Human Development Category	HDI Change, 1991-1998 (7)	Growth (2)		Poverty (3)
	Current	Real PPP\$(1)			1965-80	1980-95	
<b>Larger Island States</b>							
Cuba	1,113	3,100	Medium	-23	0.6	..	15(5)
Dominican Republic	1,663	3,923	Medium	-8	3.8	1.1	21
Haiti	285	917	Low	-34	0.9	-4	65(4)
Jamaica	1,762	3,801	Medium	-25	-0.1	1.4	32
<b>Smaller Island States</b>							
Antigua and Barbuda	6,640	9,131	High	17	-1.4	5.2(6)	12
Bahamas	12,258	15,738	High	-4	1	-0.1	5(4)
Barbados	7,120	11,306	High	-2	3.5	1.2	8(4)
Dominica	2,574	6,424	High	12	-0.8	4.3	33
Grenada	2,344	5,425	High	13	0.1	3	20
St Kitts and Nevis	3,083	10,150	High	15	4	4.9	15
St Lucia	4,642	6,503	High	10	2.7	4.4 (6)	25
St Vincent	2,032	5,969	High	22	0.2	4.5	17
Trinidad and Tobago	4,101	9,437	High	-1	3.1	-1.5	21
<b>Mainland</b>							
Belize	2,696	5,623	High	4	3.4	1.7	35
Guyana	809	3,205	Medium	-11	0.7	-1.7	43
Suriname	1,066	4,862	Medium	-10	5.5	3.4	47(4)

(1) Adjusts GDP for differences in purchasing power between countries. From UNDP HDR 1998

(2) Average annual real per capita GDP growth for period. From UNDP HDR 1998

(3) Proportion of population below income poverty, national poverty line estimate, 1989-94, except where otherwise indicated. From UNDP HDR 1998

(4) Head Count Poverty Index, mid-1990s, as reported by World Bank 1996 p. 164

(5) Urban population at risk of not accessing supply of essential goods and services. From Ferriol 1998: 19

(6) 1980-1993; from UNDP HDR 1997

(7) Change in global HDI rank, 1991-1998

All four countries have experienced low or negative real per capita growth over much or most of the last two decades. This is due to falling commodity prices and debt and adjustment crises (the Dominican Republic and Jamaica) exacerbated by the effects of political turmoil (Haiti) and the collapse of the Soviet Union (Cuba). As a result, they have lost substantial ground in their human development ranking in the world during the 1990s.

#### *Smaller island states*

This group of nine mini-states<sup>9</sup>, with less than 7 percent of the sub-region's population, enjoys levels of per capita income and of human development considerably higher than in the larger island and mainland states. Their average per capita income is 4.7 times that of the larger island states, and they are all classified as having high human development in the UNDP tables. Economic growth in the last two decades or in the 1990s has been propelled by the expansion of tourism, off-shore banking services, manufacturing, banana exports, and energy-based industries. Investment has also been strong due to political and social stability and successful macro-economic management in the majority of cases. In some of the smallest islands the fruits of economic growth have been fairly widely distributed due to the small populations, the dispersal of tourism and banana cultivation, and strong public spending on social services.

Yet problems of poverty and vulnerability cast a shadow over the future of these countries. In six of the nine countries the incidence of poverty is 15 percent or over, and the rate reaches over 20 percent in Trinidad and Tobago and two of the Windward islands and over 30 percent in Dominica. The Windward islands banana producing economies are also threatened with severe dislocation due to a WTO ruling against the preferential treatment they receive under the EU banana import regime (Lewis 1999). Vulnerability to natural disasters is evident in the damage sustained in the Windward and Leeward islands during the annual hurricane season, and in episodes such as the volcanic eruptions in Montserrat, which have dislocated an entire island community. The islands' strategic location on the principal drug trafficking routes from South America to North America and Europe has also exposed them to the activities of large international criminal organisations whose resources vastly exceed those of the local state systems.

#### *Mainland states*

The three mainland states contain 55 percent of the land area but only 4 percent of the population of the sub-region. In spite of their low population densities they are relatively poor. Per capita incomes are similar to those of the larger islands, though Belize is considerably richer on average than the other two. Both Guyana and Suriname have an export structure that is dominated by primary commodities--bauxite in the case of Suriname and bauxite and sugar in the case of Guyana—and both have been negatively affected by the weakening of commodity markets since the 1980s. Internal political conflict has also contributed to economic decline. Suriname experienced an abrupt withdrawal of Dutch aid in the 1980s following a military coup; while Guyana's

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<sup>9</sup> The official United Nations classification of a mini-state is one with a population of less than 1.5 million.

economy suffered from brain drain and capital flight during the Burnham dictatorship of the 1970s and the 1980s.

#### *Dependent territories*

The 12 dependent territories contain 14 percent of the sub-region's population and have relatively high per capita incomes. Puerto Rico predominates in this subgroup in terms of population and GDP. This territory has 10 percent of the population and 42 percent of the GDP of the insular Caribbean as a whole.

The factors behind the high incomes of the dependent territories are similar to those applying to the smaller island states, with the additional advantages of dependent status. Resource transfers to support social services are substantial in the US and French dependencies. The British and Dutch dependencies have become major off-shore banking centres, taking advantage of their political attractiveness associated with colonial protection. Most of the dependent territories have large tourist industries and small populations—a combination that inevitably results in high per capita incomes.

#### *The Caribbean Diaspora*

One consequence of these trends has been the continued growth of intra-regional migration as well as of external migration flows. This is not a new phenomenon, as intra-regional migration dates back to the end of the 19th century. Contemporary flows are oriented to the expanding tourism and service economies of the smaller island and dependent territories from the labour surplus, crisis-affected economies such as Haiti, Jamaica, the Dominican Republic, Guyana, Dominica and more recently Cuba. External migration has also continued on a substantial scale. Although this phenomenon is not as well researched as it ought to be, especially intra-Caribbean migration, the following indicators are illustrative of its importance.

The net loss of population from the region in the 1950-1989 period has been estimated at 5.5 million (Guengant 1993; cited in Samuel 1996:8); which is about 15 percent of the present population within the region. Haiti, Cuba, Jamaica and Puerto Rico each had close to 1 million of their native-born population living abroad at the close of the 1980s. In relation to the resident population, the overseas population at the end of the 1980s stood at 40 percent for both Jamaica and Guyana, 36 percent for Suriname, 23 percent for Puerto Rico, 21 percent for Trinidad and Tobago, 15 percent for Haiti, and 10 percent for Cuba. By the early 1990s the overseas population was sending home in remittances an amount equal to 71 percent of the value of exports in the case of the Dominican Republic, 32 percent in the case of Haiti, 29 percent in Jamaica and 17 percent for Barbados (Samuel 1996: Table 6). In Jamaica, remittances have been the fastest growing source of foreign exchange inflows in the 1990s. Hence, the Caribbean Diaspora is undoubtedly an important source of household income in many of these societies as well as a major aspect of people-based integration within the social life of the region itself.

To summarise, the insular Caribbean has a small number of densely populated states whose living conditions are not too dissimilar from those in the rest of the Greater Caribbean, and a large number of mini-states and dependent territories, some of which have been able to secure relatively high incomes by specialising in tourism and financial

services. It is likely that income differentials within the sub-region have widened in the past two decades, intra-regionally if not intra-nationally. Pressures arising out of shifts in the world economy and other developments generally referred to a globalisation are evident in the difficulties experienced in the most populous countries during the 1990s, and the uncertainties now faced by some of the smaller states. Poverty is a major problem in the larger countries and in several of the smaller societies, notwithstanding their higher per capita incomes. Even the relatively prosperous societies—including the dependent territories—are highly vulnerable to events not of their own making and to forces outside of their control. Caribbean people continue to move in search of survival and a better life, as they always have. But for the sub-region, vulnerability, differentiation and fragmentation continue to be major issues.

### **Regionalism in the insular and the Greater Caribbean**

Regional integration, or at least co-operation, is frequently advanced as a strategy of confronting the challenges of globalisation and the risks of marginalisation facing the insular and the Greater Caribbean. In the 1990s there has been renewed interest in regionalism as shown by the Report of the Independent West Indian Commission, the expansion of Caricom, the formation of Cariforum and the creation of the Association of Caribbean States. In the wider hemisphere there have been efforts to consolidate Mercosur, the Andean Community, and the Central American Integration System in response to the formation of Nafta and the drive towards the EU Single Market.

Regional integration cannot substitute for what is lacking at the national level. Essential foundations of effective regionalism are internal political and social cohesiveness and policy coherence. Several societies in the insular Caribbean are facing severe problems of governance and political legitimacy including Haiti, Guyana, Suriname, Jamaica, and possibly Trinidad and Tobago. These are rooted in ethnic and class conflict and in some instances in the fragility and erosion of national institutions. These problems will make it difficult to embark on regional projects that require negotiated compromises, concessions on national sovereignty and consistent implementation. In the Greater Caribbean the movement towards effective regionalism will also be conditioned by success in resolving problems of internal legitimacy in several of the G3 and Central American states.

Caricom is often referred to as one of the more successful integration groups in the developing world. But the Community has disappointed many who saw in it the possibility of organising a cohesive economic grouping with harmonised and coordinated economic policies. Initiatives that failed to be completed include the harmonisation of fiscal incentives, the regional industrial policy, joint strategies of agricultural development, and the organisation of joint industrial enterprises. By the early 1990s Caricom had opted for the newly fashionable strategy of “open regionalism”. The Common External Tariff was reduced steeply and the process of forging a Caricom Single Market and Economy was launched. Progress towards the CSME has been steady, but agonisingly slow; and the target date for completion has been put back several times. Caricom co-operation has been more successful in the field of external negotiations focussing on relations with the EU under Lome and with the US under the FTAA. Caricom’s governments continue to be driven by the immediate requirements of

preserving and enhancing existing external trade privileges; the organisation is not seen primarily as a co-operation mechanism to assist the transformation of internal social and economic relations.

A significant development in 1997 was the bid by the new Fernandez Administration in the Dominican Republic to become a bridge between the Caribbean and Central America in the forging of a “strategic alliance” between the two sub-regions (Girvan 1998). The proposal is for a Free Trade Agreement between the two sub-regions and between both and the Dominican Republic, with co-operation in business enterprise development, in tourism and investment promotion, and in external trade negotiations. Initial response has been lukewarm, as both sub-regions see little scope for the expansion of intra-regional trade and are preoccupied with the more immediate issues of Nafta parity and the EU post-Lome negotiations. Yet as the small countries of the insular Caribbean and the Isthmus discover the limits of their leverage in the post Cold War era, interest in a strategic alliance of this kind is likely to grow.

The emergence of the ACS as an inter-governmental organisation of the Greater Caribbean, may also be significant (Byron 1998). The ACS aims to foster co-operation in trade, transport and tourism. The principal ACS members already belong to integration groups: Mexico with NAFTA, Colombia and Venezuela with the Andean Group, and Central America and the Anglophone states to SICA and Caricom respectively. An ACS Free Trade Area is therefore unlikely, as is joint external negotiations on trade agreements. But the very existence of the ACS, whose headquarters are in Port-of-Spain, is stimulating interest in educational exchange, language training, trade facilitation, and sustainable tourism.

Another notable development is the growing role of non-governmental organisations in effecting regionalism at the level of civil society. In the insular Caribbean there is the Caribbean Policy Development Centre and in Central America there are several including the Civil Initiative for Central American Integration (Serbin 1998). In recent years there have been two meetings of the Permanent Forum of Greater Caribbean Civil Society, which is promoted by CRIES. The emergence of these new actors is part of a wider hemispheric and global phenomenon in the 1980s and 1990s. It corresponds to the growth of the women’s and environmental movements and of community organisations, as well as to the erosion of the state and the decline of conventional left parties due to shrinking labour union membership and the fall of the USSR. By being less bureaucratic and more flexible, visionary and voluntaristic than the existing official structures, these movements may be better placed to promote integration processes at the popular level.

### **Towards the future**

At the close of the 19<sup>th</sup> century the Caribbean had not yet been invented. The nation-state was very much a privilege of the imperial powers. The British, French and Dutch West Indies were sleepy backwaters of European empires. Haiti and the Dominican Republic were relatively isolated. Marti had died fighting for a free Cuba and *Nuestra America*, but Cuba and Puerto Rico were in the process of exchanging one imperial overlord for another. Few could have guessed at the momentous changes the 20<sup>th</sup> century would bring.

Yet these changes were already in the making. The European powers were enmeshed in a deadly imperialist rivalry that would lead not to two World Wars that were to change the political map of the world and set the stage of decolonisation. In Jamaica, Garvey had already started to question the racially stratified order of the colonial society, the first step towards his vision of a united Africa as home for black people liberated from mental slavery racial discrimination. All over the British West Indies, the second generation of free blacks had secured education and were now manning the teaching profession, which gave birth to the Trinidadian CLR James and others who were to launch the labour and independence movements of the 1930s. In Cuba, Marti's dream refused to die; 60 years later it would inspire Fidel Castro and the Cuban Revolution. The social foundations for a Sandino, a Manley I and II, a Williams, a Jagan and a Bishop had already been established.

The foundations of the changes of the early 21<sup>st</sup> century have already been laid, even if the changes themselves cannot be predicted. Capitalist globalisation and the ideology of progress are being questioned, as was imperialism 100 years ago. But so are the legacies of ideas and institutions of the political movements of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, such as national sovereignty and its expressions of nation-state, national development, and regional (inter-state) co-operation. Sovereignty and identity are being detached from a defined physical space; while culture and common interest are emerging as important frames of reference. To be sovereign in the age of global community will be less a matter of formal state authority and more a matter of developing the capacity for autonomous and proactive strategies at all levels, beginning with the community. To be regional will imply discovering shared identity and interests and acting in function of those.

If the Caribbean was an invention of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, it seems certain to be re-interpreted and perhaps transcended in the 21<sup>st</sup>. The Caribbean of tomorrow will not be an exclusively Anglophone or Hispanic conception; and it will not be tied exclusively to geographic space or definition. If it survives at all, it will be a community of shared economic, social and political interests and strategies that encompasses different languages and cultures and the Caribbean Diaspora. It might well include inter-state co-operation, but if so this will be only one of a number of spheres of interaction.

It is by no means clear to this writer that all or most of these societies will survive as viable entities; units which provide for the basic social, economic and community needs of a collection of defined citizens and with some capacity for autonomous action. Some may become just places to reside in for a while, to visit, to holiday in, and to retire to. In any case, only those legacies of the 20<sup>th</sup> century that are found to be in the interests of the people of the region will be retained and reshaped. The rest will be discarded and forgotten, and our people will move on.

Mona, February 9, 1999

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**Annex Table 1. Basic Statistics on the Greater Caribbean**

	Population Thousand	Area km <sup>2</sup>	Density Pers/km <sup>2</sup>	GDP 1995 per capita	GDP 1995 US\$Mn.	Indep'dence	Language
Mexico	90,100	1,967,183	46	2,775	250,038	1810	Spanish
Venezuela	21,852	916,445	24	3,433	75,016	1811	Spanish
Colombia	35,900	1,141,748	31	2,120	76,112	1810	Spanish
G-3	147,852	4,025,376	37	2,713	401,166		
Costa Rica	3,424	51,000	67	2,697	9,233	1821	Spanish
El Salvador	5,662	21,040	269	1,673	9,471	1821	Spanish
Guatemala	10,621	108,889	98	1,364	14,489	1821	Spanish
Honduras	5,654	112,080	50	696	3,937	1821	Spanish
Nicaragua	4,124	130,700	32	464	1,913	1821	Spanish
Panama	2,622	75,517	35	2,827	7,413	1903	Spanish
Isthmus	32,107	499,226	64	1,447	46,456		
Cuba	10,964	114,525	96	1,113	12,200	1959	Spanish
Dominican Republic	7,250	48,308	150	1,663	12,055	1844	Spanish
Haiti	7,180	27,750	259	285	2,043	1804	French
Insular non-Caricom	25,394	190,583	133	1,036	26,298		
Antigua & Barbuda	64	440	146	6,640	427	1981	English
Bahamas	279	13,864	20	12,258	3,420	1973	English
Barbados	264	431	613	7,120	1,883	1966	English
Belize	217	22,966	9	2,696	584	1981	English
Dominica	74	751	98	2,574	190	1978	English
Grenada	98	344	285	2,344	230	1974	English
Guyana	780	216,000	4	809	631	1966	English
Jamaica	2,500	11,424	219	1,762	4,406	1962	English
St. Lucia	145	616	236	3,083	448	1979	English
St. Kitts & Nevis	42	269	156	4,642	195	1983	English
St. Vincent & Grenadines	110	389	283	2,032	224	1979	English
Suriname	409	163,820	2	1,066	436	1975	Dutch
Trinidad & Tobago	1,262	5,066	249	4,101	5,175	1962	English
Caricom	6,244	436,380	14	2,923	18,249		
Aruba	82	188	434	16,810	1,370		Dutch
Netherland Antilles	207	783	265	7,871	1,632		Dutch
Dutch Territories	289	971	298	10,388	3,002		
Anguilla	10	91	113	5,932	61		English
Montserrat	10	102	98	5,155	52		English
British Virgin Islands	18	150	122	18,487	339		English
Cayman Islands	32	260	123	28,125	900		English
Turks and Caicos Islands	15	417	35	7,021	103		English
British Territories	85	1,020	83	17,106	1,454		
French Guiana (1)	141	91,000	2	9,908	1,397		French
Guadeloupe (1)	447	1,705	262	7,585	3,390		French
Martinique (1)	360	1,060	340	10,895	3,922		French
French Departments	948	93,765	10	9,187	8,709		
Puerto Rico	3,700	9,065	408	11,450	42,364		Spanish
U.S. Virgin Islands	102	342	298	13,163	1,340		English
USA Territories	3,802	9,407	404	11,495	43,704		
Insular Caribbean (2)	36,762	732,126	50	2,759	101,416		
Greater Caribbean	216,721	5,256,728	41	2,533	549,038		

(1) 1992 GDP data (2) Caricom members, Cuba, the DR, Haiti, and the dependent territories  
 Source: based on data in Ceara 1997, Annex Table 1