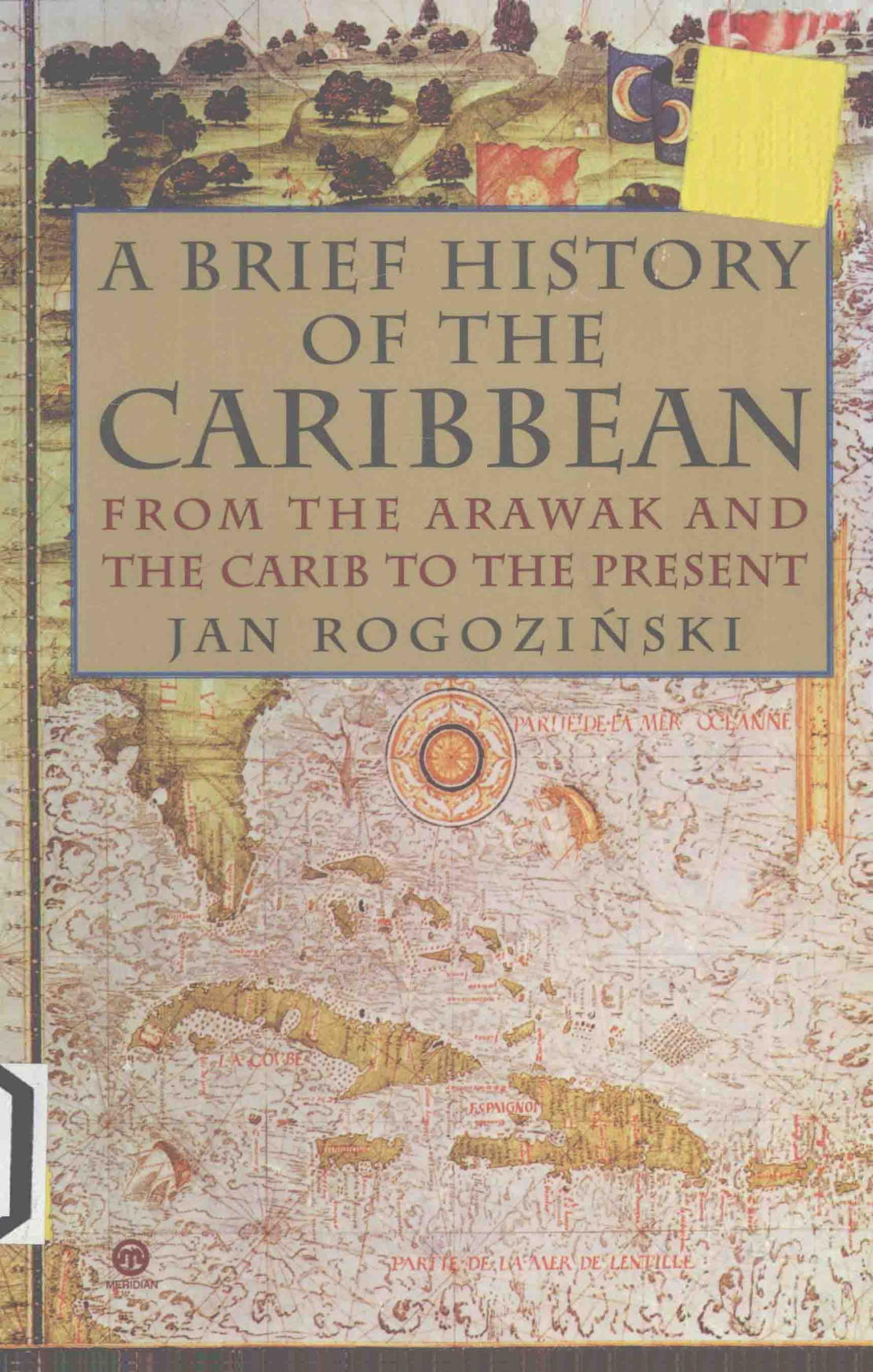
A BRIEF HISTORY
OF THE
CARIBBEAN
FROM THE ARAWAK AND
THE CARIB TO THE PRESENT
JAN ROGOZIŃSKI
PARTIE DE LA MER OCEANNE
LA COUBE
ESPAIGNOL
PARTIE DE LA MER DE LENTILLE
MERIDIAN

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JAN ROGOZIŃSKI

A MERIDIAN BOOK

For Paul Francis Hauch

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A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE CARIBBEAN

JAN ROGOZIŃSKI received a Ph.D. in social and cultural history from Princeton University. He is the author of *Smokeless Tobacco in the Western World* and *Caste, Power, and Law*, a history of France. Dr. Rogoziński lives in Fort Lauderdale, Florida.

PREFACE

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The following pages provide a descriptive and analytical history of the Caribbean islands. From the Bahamas in the north to Curaçao in the south, more than thirty million people share a common history and similar patterns of development. In recent years, the Caribbean sometimes has been more widely defined to include the mainland of Central America from Mexico down as far as French Guiana. However, the islands and the mainland really form two separate regions. These two geographic zones are endowed with very different natural environments, and they have followed divergent paths since the Spanish conquest.[1]

In recounting the history of the islands, this book focuses on the interrelated evolution of the economy, political institutions, and social forms. The Caribbean enjoys a rich intellectual, cultural, and religious life. A full appreciation of these aspects of its history would have required a much longer work.

The region's long and complex story is best understood from the inside looking out—from a point of view that begins with the islands rather than seeing them as an extension of the United States, Europe, or Africa. At the same time, the reader deserves a self-explanatory narrative, so that events are comprehensible without the use of reference books. When these must be mentioned, I have defined technical terms and identified non-Caribbean institutions and events. For example, in mentioning a treaty transferring sovereignty over an island, the text cites the signatory powers and date of signing. For many centuries, the islands formed part of large empires ruling over several continents. I describe these imperial institutions with special attention to the ways in which they evolved in the special circumstances of the Caribbean.

MANY TRADITIONS, A SHARED HISTORY

Islands are different. The seas serve both as a barrier and as a highway. Island peoples are intensely attached and loyal to their birthplace. Yet, as economic needs dictate, they easily move to other islands or to the mainland—but always intending to return to their homeland. A strong sense of local particularism or even nationalism is especially characteristic of the Caribbean. The islands are scattered across a very large sea. Until the invention of the steamship and the

airplane, the strong easterly trade winds and currents made it easier to sail from Europe to Barbados than from Cuba to Barbados. Moreover, the islands also enjoy a variety of landforms and climates, which make each different from its neighbors.

Rule by four major (and several minor) European empires increased the region's natural diversity. Island cultures were therefore more varied than in either North America (primarily northern European and Protestant) or South America (mainly Hispanic and Roman Catholic). Each empire imposed its own language, religion, habits, and prejudices on the governed. Their very different political systems also have left a lasting imprint. The Spanish tried to govern their empire from Europe. The British (at least before 1810) allowed the whites on each island to make their own laws. These distinctions were less sharp in practice than in theory. Simply because Spain was far away, it often left island élites alone to govern themselves. But the colonial centuries did leave different traditions—of one-man rule in one case, of parliamentary politics in the other.

Each of the islands has its own cultures and traditions. But they also share certain experiences that are different from those of the mainland. Since they supplied the same agricultural commodities to a world market, all have been affected by the same world-wide economic trends. With rare exceptions, all were once slave societies, to an extent never seen before or since. Their peoples thus practice similar social forms and habits, although sometimes with different names. While the island peoples have had the same experiences, they sometimes have had them at different times. Jamaica and Cuba both became major producers of sugarcane, grown by black slaves. However, Jamaica developed into a plantation society in the 18th century, Cuba during the 19th.

FROM COLONIES TO SOVEREIGN NATIONS

Given their intense insular patriotism, all islanders consider political independence a decisive event—perhaps the most decisive—in their history. About half of the islands, with perhaps 90 percent of the population, now are independent. Like the abolition of slavery, self-rule came to the islands at different times. Haiti and the Dominican Republic have governed themselves since the 19th century. Cuba became independent when American troops withdrew in 1902. Guadeloupe and Martinique (with their dependencies) gained more local autonomy in 1946 when each became a province or *département* within the French Republic. Puerto Rico became an Associated Free State or Commonwealth in 1952, and the U.S. Virgin Islands also gained control over local affairs in 1968. In 1954, the six Dutch islands became self-governing territories associated with the Netherlands, although discussions about their eventual independence continue.

Most of the former British colonies also have become sovereign states since 1962. The drive for independence began with the formation of labor unions and trade associations, supported by the British Labour party and often led by men who had served abroad during the First World War. Since most islands depended on one or two major export crops, the great depression of the 1930s was severe. Demon-

strations, strikes, and riots were frequent throughout the British Caribbean between 1935 and 1938. Other islands also suffered violence and political oppression. Rafael Trujillo imposed a police state on the Dominican Republic, while a civil war ended Gerardo Machado's attempt to establish one-man rule in Cuba. Nevertheless, a British commission chaired by Lord Moyne found much to blame in the Crown colony form of government. It called for stronger labor unions, increased self-government, and universal adult suffrage.

After the Second World War, the British authorities encouraged the formation of a West Indies Federation that included ten of their colonies. But the Federation enjoyed little popular support, and Jamaica and Trinidad withdrew and received independence in 1962. An attempt to create a smaller federation among the colonies in the Lesser Antilles also failed, and Barbados gained self-rule in 1962. Most of the remaining British colonies also became independent in the 1970s and 1980s. Anguilla, Montserrat, the British Virgin Islands, the Cayman Islands, and the Turks and the Caicos remain Crown colonies, enjoying a measure of internal self-government.

Some states remained under European rule until recently. But the United States long has been the main economic influence in the region. From the 1880s, American capital had a major role in developing the sugar industry in Cuba, Puerto Rico, and the Dominican Republic. The United States remains the region's largest trading partner—except for Cuba, which trades mainly with the Soviet Union.

The United States also intervened politically in several Caribbean states earlier in the century. For humanitarian reasons and to prevent interference by one of the warring European states, President Woodrow Wilson purchased the Danish Virgin Islands in 1917. He also sent American troops to occupy the Dominican Republic (1916–1924) and Haiti (1915–1934). In addition, the United States also intervened in Cuba on several occasions between 1906 and 1934. These American efforts failed in their avowed purpose: to establish honest, stable, and democratic governments. Thus the United States generally has taken a hands-off approach since the 1930s. However, it did send troops to intervene during civil wars in the Dominican Republic (1965) and Grenada (1983).

As they face their sixth century since Columbus irrevocably joined them to the world, the Caribbean nations may be judged a political success. Except in Haiti and Cuba, every island regularly holds elections, the winner takes office, and the loser retires—tests of democracy not met in most of the world.

The Caribbean islands continue to seek a secure economic base. Cane sugar made them the wealthiest colonies in the world during the 18th century. But the industry disappeared before the First World War from several of the islands in the Lesser Antilles. Since 1945, it also has declined in importance on the larger islands, except for Cuba. At the same time, the population has continued to soar as health care has improved, and unemployment has been high.

Efforts to find a substitute for sugar have enjoyed only mixed success. Several islands, especially Puerto Rico, that introduced manufacturing and processing industries before the mid-'70s have suffered from economic stagnation. A few governments have tried to manage the economy on the eastern European model—

Cuba since 1959, Jamaica during the 1970s, and Grenada under the Bishop regime. Their efforts failed to increase and probably hindered economic growth. Without local industry, most nations continue to pay for imported oil and industrial products with lower value agricultural products. Thus they suffer from chronic trade deficits and must depend on tourism to earn foreign currencies.

The island peoples face economic and social challenges directly linked to their history. In the Caribbean, Europeans created a plantation society unlike almost any other in human history. They settled the islands, invested large amounts of capital, and introduced sophisticated technologies for one purpose only. They replaced the extinct native peoples with hundreds of thousands of African slaves and drove them to grow sugar.

Although planters also developed other crops (notably coffee), all of the major islands were true monocultures by the middle of the 17th century. Sugar provided 80 percent or more of their exports, and many had to import food and other necessities. The sugar industry remained profitable into the 19th century. But almost all the profits were taken and remained in Europe. The islands were peopled to support one industry. That industry is no longer significant, and islanders must find alternative ways of making a living. The task for island leaders is difficult—but not impossible. A nation's history does not determine later events, and the future remains open.

For several centuries, a few white masters and many black slaves made up the societies of the sugar islands. Issues involving race thus are unavoidable in any study of Caribbean history. Over time, racial relations have taken many complex forms. In place of the stark division into two races found in some other parts of the world, island societies developed an elaborate network of shades and hierarchies. Because white laborers were few, slaves were everywhere and did every kind of work. Racial and ethnic blending began at an early period, and some members of racially mixed groups became wealthy and—especially on the French islands—owned slaves.

Precisely because they have played a crucial role throughout the history of the islands, it is essential to use meaningful and consistent language to describe racial relations. Throughout this book, I use the terms *black*, *white*, and *colored* with the meanings traditionally ascribed to them by the peoples of the islands. *Black* (French *noir*; Spanish *negro*) refers to persons perceived as being of African origin. *White* describes persons accepted by their neighbors as of European origin. *Colored* (*gens de coleur*, *gente de color*) refers to those perceived to be of mixed race, usually of mixed African-European descent. (Because the native Indians largely died out during the 16th century, alliances between Indians and other races were relatively rare.)

I have avoided the term *mulatto* because, over time, it had different meanings on various islands. Eighteenth-century authors—particularly those writing about Jamaica and Saint-Domingue—often present elaborate and complex systems of color coding with as many as eight, ten, or even sixteen categories. However, ordinary folk probably did not make these distinctions between small variations in whiteness.

Following most recent literature about the Caribbean, I use the term *freedman* to designate any male or female person of black or mixed ancestry who attained the legal status of non-slave. By the end of the 18th century, some sources distinguish between "free coloreds" and "free blacks." But these latter terms were not used consistently on the various islands.

During recent years, some in the United States have adopted the term *African-American* and prefer it to *black* and *colored*. However, a historian of the islands cannot use the analogous term "African-Caribbean." This new word would obscure a basic and important distinction. As used in the islands, African referred only to African-born slaves. The term *creole* indicated those—both black and white—born and raised in the region.[2] To make the same distinction, a writer using the term *African-Caribbean* would have to call black immigrants "African-born African-Caribbeans." Those traditionally called coloreds presumably would become "native-born African-Caribbeans of African-European ancestry." The islanders already have given us useful terms with positive connotations. Thus there seemed to be no reason to follow this new American coinage, which would have greatly lengthened the book.

* * *

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CHAPTER ONE:
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Taken together, the Caribbean islands create a kind of long narrow chain, almost 2,500 miles long but never more than 160 miles wide.[1] Running roughly north of and parallel to Central and South America, they enclose a body of water we call the Caribbean Ocean or Sea. The Caribbean can be distinguished from and is somewhat more salty than the Atlantic. But it is not a closed sea, and strong currents provide a constant interchange with the larger oceans.

On a map this long group of islands seems to form a bridge between North and South America. The historical reality has been more complicated. Merchants, planters, and job-seekers always have moved from one island to another or to the mainland. Until the end of the 19th century, however, the islands were colonies of four major European empires that sought to monopolize their resources. Thus the rivalries and the frequent wars of their foreign rulers sometimes hindered this natural flow of trade and migration.

Altogether thousands of islands rise from the Caribbean. They range in size from uninhabitable rocks and tiny cays to Cuba, which is among the world's largest islands, comparable in size to Sicily and slightly larger than Ohio. During the five centuries since their discovery by Columbus, their rulers have assigned the islands to various political and administrative divisions, and several have changed hands many times. Geographically, however, all of the islands fall into four major groupings—the Greater Antilles, the Bahamas archipelago, the lesser Antilles and the southern islands along the South American coast. These groups have different physical characteristics, and each island's natural resources have strongly influenced its economic and political fortunes.

THE GREATER AND LESSER ANTILLES, THE BAHAMAS

The four larger islands of Cuba, Jamaica, Hispaniola, and Puerto Rico are known as the Greater Antilles. All are long and relatively narrow and generally lie more or less from west to east. Just above the Greater Antilles, more than 700 small islands and cays form the Bahamas group (which geographically includes the

TABLE 1. THE CARIBBEAN ISLANDS
(Reading from Northwest to Southeast)

	SIZE (square miles)	HIGHEST POINT (feet)	ESTIMATED POPULATION mid-1991 (1,000s)
GREATER ANTILLES			
Cuba	42,827	6,142	10,732
Jamaica	4,411	7,405	2,489
Hispaniola	29,530	10,417	13,671
Haiti	10,714		6,286
Dominican Republic	18,816		7,385
Puerto Rico	3,435	3,494	3,295
Cayman Islands	96	49	28
BAHAMAS GROUP			
The Bahamas	4,566	320	252
Turks and Caicos	169		10
LESSER ANTILLES			
U.S. Virgin Islands			104
St. Croix	84	1,526	55
St. Thomas	28	1,300	50
St. John	20		3
British Virgin Islands	67	1,700	12
Tortola	24		9.2
Anegada	13		
Virgin Gorda	9		1.4
Anguilla	35	180	7
Saint-Martin/St. Maarten	13	1,391	37
Saint-Barthélemy	10		3.5
Sint Eustatius	8	1,801	1.8
Saba	5	2,900	1.1
Saint Kitts	68	3,793	32
Nevis	50	3,232	8.8
Antigua	108	1,322	64
Barbuda	62	72	1.2
Montserrat	32.5	2,435	12.5
Guadeloupe	657	4,813	345
Martinique	421	4,584	345
Dominica	305	4,666	86
Saint Lucia	233	3,120	153
Barbados	166	1,109	255
Saint Vincent	133	3,868	113
Grenadines	17		7
Grenada	120	2,756	84
Trinidad	1,864	3,087	1,245
Tobago	116	1,874	47
CURAÇAO GROUP			
Aruba	73	548	64
Bonaire	111	791	11.5
Curaçao	171	644	170

SOURCE: For population estimates, see U.S. Government, Central Intelligence Agency, *The World Factbook 1991*, Washington, D.C., 1991.

Turks and Caicos). To the east of Puerto Rico, the Lesser Antilles seem to trace a semicircle or arc that runs from the Virgin Islands in the north to Grenada in the south. Geographically and climatically, the Lesser Antilles actually fall into two groups. The larger inner arc is composed of mountainous volcanic islands. The smaller outer arc—Anguilla, Barbuda, Antigua, and the eastern half of Guadeloupe—are much lower in height. These are primarily formed of limestone, and have a dryer climate, characteristics which also are shared by Barbados to the south.

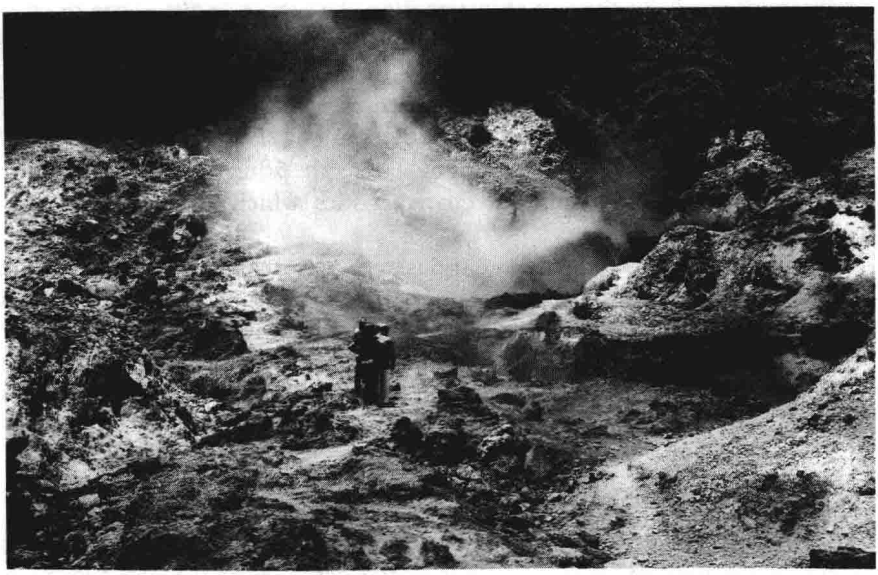
Trinidad, Tobago, and the three arid islands of Aruba, Bonaire, and Curaçao form a fourth grouping. The weather patterns of the Curaçao islands, located just off the coast of South America, are very different from those affecting other Caribbean islands. Although they sometimes were politically affiliated with the Lesser Antilles, Trinidad and Tobago are an extension of the South American mainland and share its climate.

MOUNTAINOUS ISLANDS AND FLAT ISLANDS

Except for the Bahamas, almost all of the Caribbean islands represent the peaks of mountains that rise from the floor of the ocean, thrust up by enormous pressures under the earth's surface during two separate eras in the distant past. According to geological theories, these pressures deep below the surface of the planet cause the continents to move very slowly over long periods of time. The earth's crust is composed of large rigid sections, known as *plates*, that move alongside one another. One of these plates more or less coincides with the Caribbean Sea, with its outer edge being marked by the arc of the Lesser Antilles. It moves very slowly eastward relative to the North American plate, which in turn is tending toward the west. The boundary where these two plates meet in the Caribbean islands suffers from recurring volcanic activity as well as serious earthquakes.

In geological terms, the oldest islands are the Greater Antilles and the eastern or outer arc of the Lesser Antilles. Volcanic activity created both of these groups some 70 to 50 million years ago.[2] The Greater Antilles thus represent the peaks of three chains of volcanic mountains that were thrust up and extended east from the mainland. The first of these mountain ranges ran east along what is now the northern coast of Cuba and Haiti. A middle and much longer chain of volcanoes created the Cayman Islands. It then continued east along the southern coast of Cuba (the Sierra Maestre) and through the central regions of Haiti (the Cordillera Central) and Puerto Rico (El Yunque), finally coming to an end at what today is known as the Virgin Islands. A third and southernmost chain created the Blue Mountains of Jamaica and then extended along the southern coast of Haiti.

While Central America and the Greater Antilles were rising from the sea, similar volcanic forces created the Andes Mountains. Branches of this great South American chain continue north and east to make up the Caribbean Coast range. The highest peaks of one branch of this coastal mountain range form the islands of Aruba, Bonaire, and Curaçao just north of the mainland. Another



Volcanic islands: Vapor vents, Saint Lucia. Volcanic vents and hot sulfurous springs cover an extensive area near the coastal town of Soufrière. During the 18th century, the island exported sulfur dug from the springs, which also were used for medicinal baths.

branch stretches north from Colombia and Venezuela to Trinidad and Tobago, and perhaps to Barbados.

This age of great earth movements was followed by a quieter era—dated by geologists between the Middle Eocene and the Middle Miocene epochs. Volcanic activity died down. The sea again covered parts or all of the islands. Great deposits of sediment, such as sandstone and limestone, were laid down as the bodies of marine animals decayed. And some of the older islands—especially those along the outer rim of the Lesser Antilles—were flattened out and never again became active volcanoes. After several million years had passed, a second great period of mountain building took place during the late Miocene and Pliocene epochs. The four islands of the Greater Antilles again arose above the sea. And new volcanoes—several are still active today—created the inner arc of mountainous islands in the Lesser Antilles.[3]

The Bahamas group (including the Turks and Caicos) includes more than 700 small islands, innumerable rocks and cays, and hundreds of reefs lying only a few feet below the surface. Strictly speaking these islands and reefs are not found within the Caribbean Sea. And, unlike the Caribbean islands proper, they were not formed by volcanic eruptions. Instead they represent the highest points of the Bahamas Banks, two shallow blocks of rocks covered by limestone and sand that at various points in the ancient past probably rose above the water to form one landmass. Many of the Bahamas stand only a few feet above the water, with the highest hills—on Cat Island—reaching some 300 feet. Although their land surface taken together is close to that of Jamaica, only 22 are inhabited.