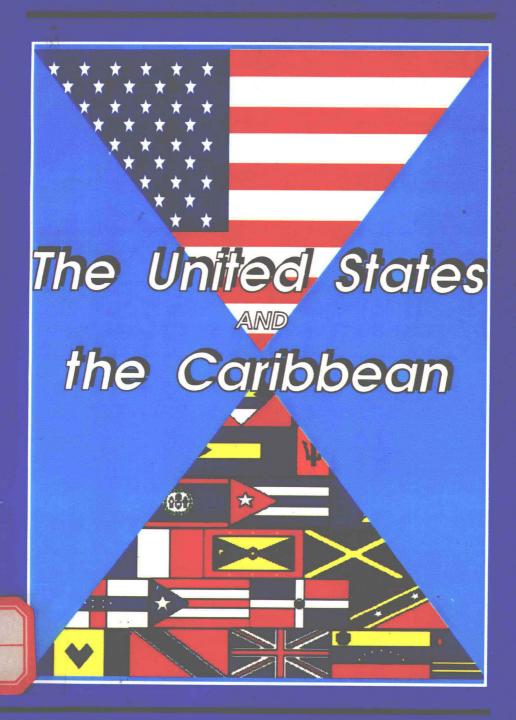
ANTHONY P. MAINGOT



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The United States and the Caribbean

Challenges of an Asymetrical Relationship

Anthony P. Maingot

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Preface

This author has taken to heart three strictures about writing on the Caribbean advanced by the late Gordon K. Lewis. First, that study has to have historical depth. Caribbean realities should be studied in terms of the process of becoming rather than purely as they presently appear to be. Secondly, that study has to be comparative for the simple reason that there is no 'cultural core' in the region, no single country, ethnic or linguistic group which can be studied as 'the Caribbean.' One selects cases in terms of their longer term impacts on the region, and, in this case, on US-Caribbean relations.

To Lewis, both approaches are necessary if we are to reach what he called 'a reasonable sympathetic understanding' of the past, present and future of Caribbean peoples. I share with Lewis also his admonition that there should be nothing sentimental about this understanding. Lewis had a particular dislike for those who believed that they had to make a case for the Caribbean by 'going native' or becoming 'instant revolutionaries'. Precisely because he was himself of the socialist and anti-imperialist persuasion, this passionate Caribbeanist felt that the form most suited to an understanding of the Caribbean was the high essay. In that genre, clearly expressed ideas and opinions encourage - indeed, invite - review and critical analysis. The very nature of the field compels constant debates not only on facts but perhaps more critically on interpretations. Given the economic, political and social diversity of the region, there can be no claims to historical finality or sociological certainty. This explains Lewis' third methodological stricture: the study of the Caribbean has to be multidisciplinary. No one approach or body of theory can satisfactorily elucidate an area in which the Spanish, Dutch, French, British and American influences have blended with African and Asian cultural retentions to create extraordinarily complex, fluid and changing identities and identifications.

Certainly, all three approaches are necessary if we are to make any sense of the complex and changing relationships between the Caribbean and the US. It is difficult enough to trace the watersheds in US foreign policy towards the region; it is additionally difficult to describe and explain the varying responses of the region to the US.

This study attempts to do both things. But, in addition, it searches for the synergies which can result when a major power interacts respectfully and honourably with smaller states in a wide range of areas, both governmental and private. In other words, because of the large number of interactions, many cross cutting in nature, the total effect of those relationships taken together tends to be greater than the sum of the effects taken independently. Such synergies can be found, for example, in Caribbean migration to the US. While in some ways it represents a brain drain for the islands, that is not the whole story. For instance, it is evident that these small economies cannot employ all the highly-trained skilled labour they educate. Rather than curtailing that excellent education - which, aside from being politically unpopular, would deprive both the US and themselves of skilled workers - they continue to educate with the expectation that many will migrate. Those who migrate, in turn, remit monies home, come back as tourists, and serve as representatives for their islands in the metropolis. This process can grow to the point were the interrelations are so varied and beneficial to both societies that it becomes necessary to speak of 'binational' societies. The diaspora from the Dominican Republic has already been so designated,2 the Jamaican and Haitian diasporas could probably also claim such a status.

One can also search for synergies in the political and international arenas. The issue of synergies is inferred in the central question posed by Robert Pastor in his excellent analysis of US-Latin American relations. Noting the difference between certain leaders such as Jamaica's Edward Seaga and Michael Manley and Panama's Omar Torrijos on the one hand and Nicaragua's Daniel Ortega and Panama's Manuel Noriega on the other, Pastor advises us that 'the issue for Latin America is why Noriega and Ortega brought out the worst in the US and Torrijos and the two Jamaicans brought the best.'

In the post-Cold War era this is a question of vital importance. It is important for those nations which have maintained good relations with Washington but perhaps especially for those like Cuba which have not. The collapse of the socialist bloc, though arguably not necessarily of socialism, and the rise of new trading blocs with their emphasis on free enterprise and international competition, make good relations with the US indispensable for every country in the Caribbean.

Fortunately, such good relations are not as problematic as much of the literature which portrayed the US as the 'natural' enemy of the Caribbean would have us believe. That literature tended to be premised on a misreading of Caribbean society and, thus, of how it related to the US. It confused the Caribbean peoples' historical capacity and propensity to be morally indignant at injustice with a propensity for revolution. Applauding and celebrating every revolution and pseudo-revolution which came along, these authors overlooked the fact that the central thrust of Caribbean life has been the pursuit of progressive ends through moderate or conservative

means.⁴ Caribbean peoples have repeatedly 'surprised' observers with their attachment to liberal democratic institutions and respect for human rights.⁵ Certainly the long memory of slavery and indentured bondage to the plantations partly explains this profound dislike of social or economic regimentation. Whatever shortcomings might derive from the testy individualism of Caribbean people, it also might explain why political pluralism is the preferred – and arguably, the most suited – form of governance.⁶

Fortunately, Caribbean intellectuals are reconsidering certain erst-while radical premises. The lesson of Grenada's brief deviation from democracy was not lost on them, regardless of their ideological persuasions. Gordon Lewis himself was deeply moved by the tragic ending of that socialist experiment and agreed with one of the Caribbean's most respected socialist intellectuals, Clive Y. Thomas, who spoke for many in the Caribbean: 'after Grenada, no social project . . . will receive widespread support from the popular forces and their organizations if it does not clearly embrace political democracy as its norms of political conduct.'

Even in those cases, such as Cuba, where there was an initial preference for centralized authoritarian politics and command economies, the tendency after 1990 has been towards both political and economic decentralization. There are few more urgent tasks in the Caribbean than to encourage those in Cuba who, since 1991, have been slowly but surely edging their system towards pluralism and democracy. The continued isolation of Cuba is counterproductive and out of step with the general relaxation of world tensions, the reduction of intransigence in state rhetoric and, fundamentally, to the need of a region-wide response to the new threats to state sovereignty and well-being which are far removed from the menaces identified during the Cold War.

Finally, the tendency to dismiss liberal democratic forms as merely 'formal' and thus presumably irrelevant in international relations, is fundamentally flawed. In a world in which the major powers – the US, the EC, Japan and multilateral agencies such as the IMF and the World Bank – all promote democratic values, possessing and practising them is a form of capital. Pierre Bourdieu calls such values which are widely shared 'symbolic capital.' Like any other form of capital, it can be used in the ongoing bargaining these small states engage in with their powerful neighbour to the north. Retaining and enhancing that symbolic capital is crucial in the Caribbean's search for synergies in the very asymmetrical relationship they have with the US and to sustain the autonomy of their foreign policies. Because these two facts, autonomy and the use of symbolic capital, are central themes of this book, an example of their operation is now considered.

In 1992 the members of the English-speaking Caribbean established a CARICOM-Cuba Commission to explore opportunities for dialogue and

practical co-operation. It seemed a logical step, given their equally autonomous establishment of diplomatic relations with Cuba in the 1970s and Cuba's search for reinsertion into the hemisphere. The news of this initiative elicited an 'outraged' response from the chairman of the sub-committee on Western Hemisphere Affairs of the US House of Representatives, Robert G. Torricelli and three of his Cuban-American colleagues on the sub-committee. Even as they chastized and threatened the West Indians with dire consequences, the congressmen had to admit that they were aware that the West Indian response was not long in coming and, not surprisingly, they rejected the threats from the congressmen, underscoring their independence through a reassertion of the symbolic capital represented by their political practices:

The decision of the Community was taken, very conscious of the deep-seated commitment of all CARICOM countries to the democratic process and to human rights... these matters speak for themselves and it has been noted that you yourself have acknowledged this. . . . The Caribbean Community has an extremely strong interest in the peaceful resolution of issues in the Region, including Cuba. 10

One month after this exchange, four of the CARICOM prime ministers met with President Bill Clinton. The issue of relations with Cuba was not raised in public, that opportunity was taken to describe in the most effusive terms just how strong the democracies of these nations were.

The West Indians, along with virtually all others in the Caribbean, continue to strengthen their relationships with Cuba.

Notes

- 1 Cf. Anthony P. Maingot, *The Passionate Advocate: Gordon K. Lewis and the Caribbean Studies* (Centre for Caribbean Studies, University of Warwick, 1992).
- 2 Cf. Luis E. Guarnizo, 'The Emergence of a binational Society: Dominican Migrants at Home and Abroad', in Anthony P. Maingot (ed.) Trends in US-Caribbean Relations (The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science, forthcoming May 1994).
- 3 Robert A. Pastor, Whirlpool: US Foreign Policy Towards Latin America and the Caribbean (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1992), p. 17.
- 4 Cf. Anthony P. Maingot, 'The Difficult Path to Socialism in the English-Speaking Caribbean', in Richard R. Fagen (ed.) Capitalism and the State in US-Latin American Relations (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1979), pp. 254-301. See also Anthony P. Maingot, 'The Caribbean: The Structure of Modern-Conservative Societies', in Jan Knippers Black, Latin America, Its Problems and Its Promise (Boulder: Westview Press, 1984), pp. 362-78.

- 5 See, for instance, the imaginative essay by Jorge I. Dominguez, 'The Caribbean Question: Why Has Liberal Democracy (Surprisingly) Flourished?' in Jorge I. Dominguez, Robert A. Pastor, and R. Delisle Worrel (eds), *Democracy in the Caribbean* (Baltimore, MD.: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993), pp. 1–25.
- 6 Cf. Anthony Payne, 'Westminster Adapted: The Political Order of the Commonwealth Caribbean', in Dominguez, Pastor and Worrel, op. cit., pp. 57-73.
- 7 Cited in Gordon K. Lewis, *Grenada, The Jewel Despoiled* (Baltimore, MD.: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1987), p. 197.
- 8 Cf. Pierre Bourdieu and Loic J.D. Wacquant, An Invitation to Reflexive Sociology (Chicago, II.: The University of Chicago Press, 1992).
- 9 Letter from sub-committe, 26 July, 1993.
- 10 Letter of response from CARICOM Secretariat, 19 August, 1993.

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Introduction The nature of complex interdependence

If one were to choose a single word to encapsulate Caribbean history, that word would have to be 'geopolitics', the relationship between geography and international relations. The most important part of Caribbean geography has been the sea, which has historically served less as the clichéd 'inner lake' than as a series of maritime highways linking the Caribbean to the rest of the world. These 'highways' explain why the Caribbean has never been isolated. In the fifteenth century the Caribbean became a centre of activity as direct sea mobility and contact changed the nature of movement in the world from an essentially land-centred basis to one in which trans-oceanic mobility was the key to empire and riches. As testaments to that sea's importance were the competitions over colonies and the attempts to manage that colonial competition through unilateral dictates. First came the Treaty of Tordesillas (1494) through which the Pope wished to separate that part of the new world which was 'rightfully' Spanish from that which was Portuguese. By Papal mandate other powers were to stay out. The Caribbean as we define it - the islands and the bordering mainland - fell into the portion that was assigned to Spain but, as would later be shown with another unilateral attempt at establishing a 'demarcation line' -The Monroe Doctrine – it was easier to proclaim a geopolitical doctrine than to enforce it.

What the history of archipelagic areas teaches us is that even the mightiest of naval powers cannot totally dominate each and every square mile of sea or island in the area. Even the presence of the greatest concentration of fortifications in the world would not secure total hegemony for any one power. This explains the presence of the British, Dutch, French and Danish alongside the Spaniards. It also explains the paradoxical nature of social change in the Caribbean. For instance, control of one small island off the coast of Haiti (Ile de la Tortue) was enough to provide an international band of pirates with a base from which to harass all merchant shipping and then, to penetrate the main island itself. Gradually that penetration turned into an occupation by more and more French corsairs. In 1697, at the Treaty of Ryswick, the eastern third of the island was turned over to France. In less than a century St Domingue became one of the

richest pieces of real estate in the world, even as the larger Spanish part languished. The slaves of that island they called Haiti rose in an heroic liberation movement even as other lands (the US, Cuba, Brazil) were only then entering their most profitable phase of slave-based manufacturing.

Today, Haiti is among the poorest countries in the world, economically and politically out of step with the rest of the region. That island deserves, and gets, special attention in this study as we explore the balance between internal and external factors in social change.

Finally, and fatefully for the Caribbean, it was the US which ended the nineteenth century by taking Cuba, Puerto Rico and eventually – in 1917 – buying the Virgin Islands from the Danes. The \$25 million the US paid the Danes was a considerable figure if we realize that the US had paid France \$15 million for Louisiana (and its hinterland), had bought Florida from Spain for \$10 million, and paid the Russians \$7.2 million for Alaska. It was small, however, compared to the \$300 million spent to build the Panama canal. American geopolitical interests in the Caribbean did not begin with the ownership of that canal but after 1914 the canal became the geopolitical centre of gravity in the region.

These were the actual territorial conquests or purchases. But geopolitics is not just a matter of creating colonies, it has also to do with the creation of spheres of influence. Certainly, gaining influence rather than occupying territory, was the American strategy in the Caribbean. This being the case, we need to define what we mean by a sphere of influence. A sphere of influence, says John P. Vlogantes, is an area into which is projected the power and influence of a country primarily for political, military-strategic, or economic purposes, but sometimes cultural purposes may be added.¹

If explicit colonialism involves an outright exercise of power vested in a formal colonial authority, a sphere of influence involves any one of a range of possible uses of power: from informal persuasion to direct state coercion. There are some important consequences which flow from this. First and foremost is that the degree of Great Power control – and, thus, inversely, the degree of local independence – can vary greatly. As Vlogantes notes, a paramount power exercises a degree of influence consonant with the effects sought but modified by the resistance capability of the sphere state.² Just how consistently exclusive the American sphere of influence in the Caribbean has been, is a question for empirical research, not dogmatic assertion. Nowhere in this text will the reader find those facile assumptions that relate the description of being 'on the periphery' with being 'underdeveloped', 'dependent' and, consequently, 'lacking sovereignty' or self-determination.³

In his discussion of the various 'lenses' used to interpret events in Latin America and the Caribbean – the conservative, liberal and radical –

Robert Pastor notes that they all share one basic premise: that most developments in the region result from decisions made by the US.4 Because of the disparity in size, power and wealth, 'it is logical that the US should simply work its will.' I agree with Pastor that this premise is flawed. The analysis of Costa Rica's turbulent search for democracy in the 1940s is precisely an effort to show how events with long-term region-wide consequences unfolded with little if any US involvement. Unfortunately, this example of successful self-determination was lost on US policymakers.

This author also agrees with Pastor's call for an 'interactive' lens: looking at the region in terms of actions which interact with each other and with the US. This perspective recognizes the vast asymmetry in power between the US and the rest but does not assume that this ipso facto means total control. 'Indeed', Pastor concludes, 'such power is reversible, with leaders or groups in the region trying to use the US to further their own political or economic ends.'5 We show just such a relationship in our analysis of how Caribbean leaders 'played the Cuban card'. (See Chapter 6).

Additionally, even as we make the asymmetry in power between the US and the Caribbean a central point of our analysis, we believe that the degree of direct or indirect coercion or undue influence has also to be empirically established. This is so because spheres of influence can also result from a mutually acceptable relationship freely entered into by all parties. As we shall see, at least since World War II, Caribbean leaders challenged as was the US by U-boats and fifth columns - have tended to share with Washington not only the definitions of the problems facing them but also the preferred solutions to them. Thus, it is not 'dependence' or lack of sovereignty which has often led Caribbean leaders to turn to the US leadership and initiative, but a coincidence or interdependence of interests.

This perspective is especially important if we keep in mind that there are other complex and non-coercive ways in which spheres of influence are established, as in transnational relations. The latter involves many of the processes described in this book such as the activities of the private sector, migration flows, private financial transfers and movements and even internationalized criminal activity. In the post-Cold War era such transnational relations have taken on primacy. As Henry Kissinger put it: '... we are entering a new era. Old international patterns are crumbling; old slogans are uninstructive; old solutions are unravelling. The world has become interdependent in economics, in communications, in human aspirations.'6

The complexities of such an interdependent relationship should persuade us to ask a series of questions about US-Caribbean relations which are premised on the concept of a sphere of influence. Thus, we need to establish empirically four types of cases:

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- (1) Outright military intervention which had long-term and region-wide influences.
- (2) Cases where we can prove that Caribbean actors have deferred to US policies despite their fundamental philosophical dissention from them and which have negative consequences for those actors.
- (3) Cases where, despite initial reservations, Caribbean actors have made a rational calculation that US policies are desirable because accepting them results in a beneficial exchange of private or public goods.
- (4) Cases where there have been legitimate philosophical and material convergences of goals.

No objective reading of US-Caribbean relations will leave much doubt that all four types of relationships have existed, sequentially or even simultaneously.

As we hope the chapters in this book will demonstrate, it is best to describe US-Caribbean relations as one of complex interdependence because it has involved at least three characteristics:⁷

- (1) Societies in the region have historically been (and certainly are today) connected through multiple channels: governmental, private institutions and personal and familial. The non-governmental relations, called transnational relations in the literature, are often the most important.
- (2) There has been no consistent hierarchy in the agenda of US-Caribbean relations. For instance, neither military nor economic issues can be assumed a priori to have consistently dominated the relationships between the US and one, or all, of the Caribbean nations. In a world in which the clear-cut distinctions between domestic and foreign policies are blurred, pertinent issues will often result from the interplay of sectoral interests. Throughout the analysis it will be clear that in the US, the departments of the Treasury, of Commerce and, increasingly, the Attorney-General's office, play international roles as significant as that of the State Department. In most Caribbean states, however, foreign affairs remains the exclusive domain of the head of government.⁸ Prime Ministers, not Foreign Ministers, run foreign policy. Only they, it is believed, can fully co-ordinate policy on the complex, and interdependent, issues of today's world. And yet, they do not control many of the transnational relations of their societies.
- (3) All this means that military force, while certainly an option of the major power, as we shall see, cedes in importance in direct relationship to the growth in complex interdependence.

If all this works to make complex interrelationships seem quite benign to the small state, that is not the intention here. Put simply, the absence of direct, coercive relationships does not mean the absence of influence, that outwardly quiet and possibly gradual exertion of power and persuasion.

The fact remains that even if the analysis reveals that the influence exercised did not stem from any undue degree of coercion or co-optation, there are still two delicate issues which flow from asymmetrical relationships. First, there is what C.J. Friedrich calls 'the rule of anticipated reaction.'9 Leaders of small states are particularly prone to anticipate the reactions of the one who exercises the dominant influence in a region. As Friedrich noted, more often than not influence operates in these cases by changing the conduct of people without any outward appearance of change. One of the values which the leaders of small societies certainly internalize is a realistic sense of limits.

Beyond the anticipated reaction of leaders, there operates also in the Caribbean what sociologists term 'anticipatory socialization'. As we will note in the chapter on immigration, Caribbean people hardly wait until they arrive in the US to adopt 'American ways'. Migration and the international demonstration effect are operating to 'Americanize' the region.

Two points arise about these very real processes. First, there is little that economically open and politically democratic countries can do to stop these foreign influences. The argument that national cultures are too important to be abandoned to free market forces is an important one worth defending. It is necessary, however, to be realistic about the new roles of cable, satellite and video systems in making such cultural nationalism quite futile. Not even state-mandated censorship can work in as open an area as the Caribbean. In those cases where there have been attempts to prohibit the free movement of people and ideas (viz. Cuba and less intensely, Grenada), these attempts have failed. There is no isolation possible in a region such as the Caribbean. The second point is that even if US influences, both official and transnational, are the dominant ones, the traffic on those sea lanes which criss-cross the Caribbean hardly run in only one direction. America is itself yielding to the new cultural pressures of its new ethnic groups. Influences run in both directions, thus enriching the complexity of interdependence.

In such an interdependent world, many of the ongoing debates over the 'exact causes' of US geopolitical interests in the region have to be recast to accommodate the four possible relationships listed above. One can certainly understand those who believe that US imperial-like expansionism was purely a search for new markets which led to American interests in the Caribbean Basin.¹⁰ One also finds plausible the argument which sees ideology as the driving force: fulfilling the 'White Man's Burden' in its peculiarly American Puritan form.11

The important task for US-Caribbean relations today is to discern how this past affected and continues to affect the perceptual predispositions which govern contemporary international relations. As Robert Jervis notes, whatever the theoretical disagreements among scholars of international politics, there is one area in which there is convergence among the students: it is the image, the perception, which leaders have of each other and of the nature of world politics, that is a fundamental determinant of what happens between states. And it is crucial to understand that these perceptions are shaped before entering office. The convictions that leaders have formed before reaching high office, says Henry Kissinger, are the intellectual capital they will consume as long as they continue in office.

Some of the most enduring attitudes and perceptions between peoples have to do with symbolic, not material grievances or satisfactions. Through the process of ethnic identifications, actions against particular countries are interpreted as offensive to the whole collectivity. This is especially the case when the major power justifies its international behaviour by advancing odious comparisons of race and culture. This, as we demonstrate in Chapter 1, is precisely what occurred in the Caribbean, feeding anti-Americanism throughout the whole hemisphere, as Professor Samuel Guy Inman of Columbia University discovered. Inman was part of the US State Department's post-World War II diplomatic offensive to reduce South American anti-Americanism.¹³ In Chile, anticipating that the thrust of the questions would be on economic domination, he prepared to explain US economic policies thoroughly. This was not what the Chilean students wished to discuss. They asked rather: 'How do you explain the Baltimore Incident?' To Inman, Baltimore was an American city; to the Chileans it was the US Navy vessel which docked in Valparaiso where some of its sailors behaved as was their habit: fighting Chilean sailors in a night spot called the True Blue Saloon. In the riot which followed, one of the Americans was killed.

What followed was a test of wills between the US and Chile, both vowing to defend and redeem its national honour and dignity. The Chileans eventually backed-down, paying reparations and swallowing their pride. To Chilean students half a century later, this incident was more important than the claims of economic exploitation which Inman had come to explain, though not defend.

Again, in Argentina, knowing that Britain, not the US was the 'imperial power', Inman was surprised at the anti-Americanism of the Argentine students. He soon discovered that many Argentinean intellectuals had formed their opinion of American imperialism by studying US interventions in the Caribbean. Indeed, many had joined the Latin American Union, a continent-wide protest movement against US actions in the Dominican Republic, Haiti, Nicaragua and Cuba. This, not US investments, was what Inman found these scholars most eager to discuss.

It should come as no surprise, therefore, to anyone entering the museum of Cuban history in Havana when he or she is confronted with a

picture of a drunken US sailor urinating on the statue of Cuba's most honoured hero, José Martí. The picture had originally been published in Bohemia in the early 1930s and has fuelled anti-American feelings since that date.

Thus, in international relations symbols are as important, if not more so, than cold statistics. Forging a sphere of influence is certainly not the same as an imperial conquest but the symbolic legacies can be strikingly similar. If the relationship is not based on mutual respect and consideration, no matter how materially beneficial that relationship might be, it will be regarded as colonial and offensive to national honour. For example, Williams Jennings Bryan's foreign policy might not have been 'classical colonialism', i.e. he did not advocate acquiring territory, but his assertion that 'the Filipinos cannot be citizens without endangering our civilization' was considered classical colonialism by the many who in other ways had been offended by American expressions of racial and cultural supremacy.

Having said this, it is wrong to draw blanket conclusions about US-'Caribbean' perceptions of each other. The reality is that Caribbean responses to American actions over the years have varied among Caribbean states according to the particular nature of their unique contacts with the Americans.

The dramatic expansion of US actions and interventions during the period 1803-1935 described in Chapter 2 generated very mixed feelings among the Caribbean peoples involved, i.e. those of the Spanish-speaking Caribbean. Mixed feelings because they invariably included a very strong admiration for what the Americans had accomplished at home with deepseated resentment of their actions abroad. This ambiguity surely has been the basis of a consistent and often violent form of anti-Americanism in the region. Various Caribbean peoples have had to struggle with very mixed feelings towards the US. Panama was one such case. There, a complex lovehate relationship complicated their relations with the US, as a former US ambassador explains:

Panamanian appreciation for the US role in their independence was profound. During three-quarters of a century after that momentous event, Panamanians knew that the Colossus of the North was the most reliable guarantor of their continued freedom. But, while one may take comfort from the protection a nearby friendly power affords, no one likes to be beholden. . . . As Balzac said: 'Gratitude is a charge upon the inheritance which the second generation is apt to repudiate.'14

Cuban anti-Americanism showed similar configurations. The influential Cuban historian, Emilio Roig de Leuchsenring, once wrote that the most sacred duty of any Cuban intellectual was to rescue Cuban honour by