

THE CARIBBEAN WORLD AND THE UNITED STATES



DRINKING RUM AND
COCA-COLA

ROBERT FREEMAN SMITH

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Mixing Rum and Coca-Cola

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TWAYNE'S INTERNATIONAL HISTORY SERIES

Akira Iriye, editor
Harvard University

To Charlotte, my wife, for the
strength and inspiration to take up
the pen once more; and to
Cuddles, the furry dog who slept
under my desk like another dog
named Peggy at another time, for
another book

FOREWORD

Twayne's International History Series seeks to publish reliable and readable accounts of post-World War II international affairs. Today, nearly 50 years after the end of the war, the time seems opportune to undertake a critical assessment of world affairs in the second half of the twentieth century. What themes and trends have characterized international relations since 1945? How have they evolved and changed? What connections have developed between international and domestic affairs? How have states and peoples defined and pursued their objectives and what have they contributed to the world at large? How have conceptions of warfare and visions of peace changed?

These questions must be addressed if one is to arrive at an understanding of the contemporary world that is both international—with an awareness of the linkages among different parts of the world—and historical—with a keen sense of what the immediate past has brought to human civilization. Hence Twayne's International History Series. It is to be hoped that the volumes in this series will help the reader to explore important events and decisions since 1945 and to develop a global awareness and historical sensitivity with which to confront today's problems.

The first volumes in the series examine the United States' relations with other countries, groups of countries, or regions. The focus on the United States is justified in part because of the nation's predominant positions in postwar international relations, and also because far more extensive documentation is available on American foreign affairs than is the case with other countries. The series addresses not only those interested in international relations but also those studying America's and other countries' histories, who will find here useful guides and fresh insights into the recent past. Now more than ever it is imperative to understand the complex ties between national and international history.

In this volume Robert Freeman Smith, the author of a number of important studies of U.S. relations with Mexico and other countries in the Western

Hemisphere, presents a fascinating story of the Caribbean, its people, their culture, and the United States' military, economic, and cultural involvement in the Caribbean peoples' affairs. Readers who have perused the author's earlier writings may be struck that he is less critical of U.S. policies and strategies in this volume than elsewhere. Those who have read John H. Coatsworth's book in the series, *Central America and the United States*, will also note a very different approach to the region. I welcome the presentation of different interpretations and perspectives, for by comparing and examining sharply divergent views of the past, one gains fresh insights not only into international history but into the writing of that history as well.

Akira Iriye

PREFACE

Ask most Americans what they think or know about the Caribbean and you will probably get a catalog of things such as Bacardi rum, Piña Colladas, banana daiquiris, Macanudo cigars, calypso music, and cha cha cha. And some would include a list of famous personalities like Harry Bellafonte, Desi Arnez, Geraldo Rivera, Roberto Clemente, and José Canseco. Others might mention sunny beaches in January, snorkeling, gambling casinos, and grilled conch. Perhaps a few place names might show up—San Juan Hill for history buffs, Guantanamo Bay for those who have sailed with the Caribbean fleet, and Charlotte Amalie for the duty-free shoppers.

The makers and shapers of American foreign policy would present another kind of analysis. For example, in 1931 Secretary of State Henry L. Stimson succinctly stated the basic importance of the Caribbean region to the United States:

That locality has been the one spot external to our shores which nature has decreed to be most vital to our national safety, not to mention our prosperity. It commands the line of the great trade route which joins our eastern and western coasts. . . . Since the Panama Canal has become an accomplished fact, it has not only become the vital artery of our coastwise commerce but, as well, the link in our national defense which protects the defensive power of our fleet. One cannot fairly appraise American policy toward Latin America . . . without taking into consideration all of the elements of which it is the resultant.¹

Stimson stressed the interests that have made the Caribbean one of the most important international areas to the United States even from the beginning of the nation's history. And this interest predates independence by at least a century.

Almost a century before Secretary Stimson wrote these words, Secretary of State John Quincy Adams wrote concerning Cuba and Puerto Rico, "These

islands, from their local position, are natural appendages to the North American continent; and one of them, Cuba, almost in sight of our shores, from a multitude of considerations has become an object of transcendent importance to the political and commercial interests of our Union." After listing several of these, including "its commanding position with reference to the Gulf of Mexico and the West India seas," Adams stated that all of these factors, "give it an importance in the sum of our national interests, with which that of no other foreign territory can be compared, and little inferior to that which binds the different members of this Union together."²

This list of quotations could be expanded ad infinitum, but the point should be clear—the Caribbean is central to the historical definition of U.S. national interests. Over the course of its history the United States has been more consistently involved in the Caribbean than any other area in the world. This should not be surprising, as the Caribbean forms part of the southern frontier of the United States. Until the twentieth century the area was virtually a European-controlled lake. Spain, France, Great Britain, the Netherlands, Denmark, and even Sweden had colonies in the Caribbean, and it was not until 1898 that the United States really began to challenge this European domination.

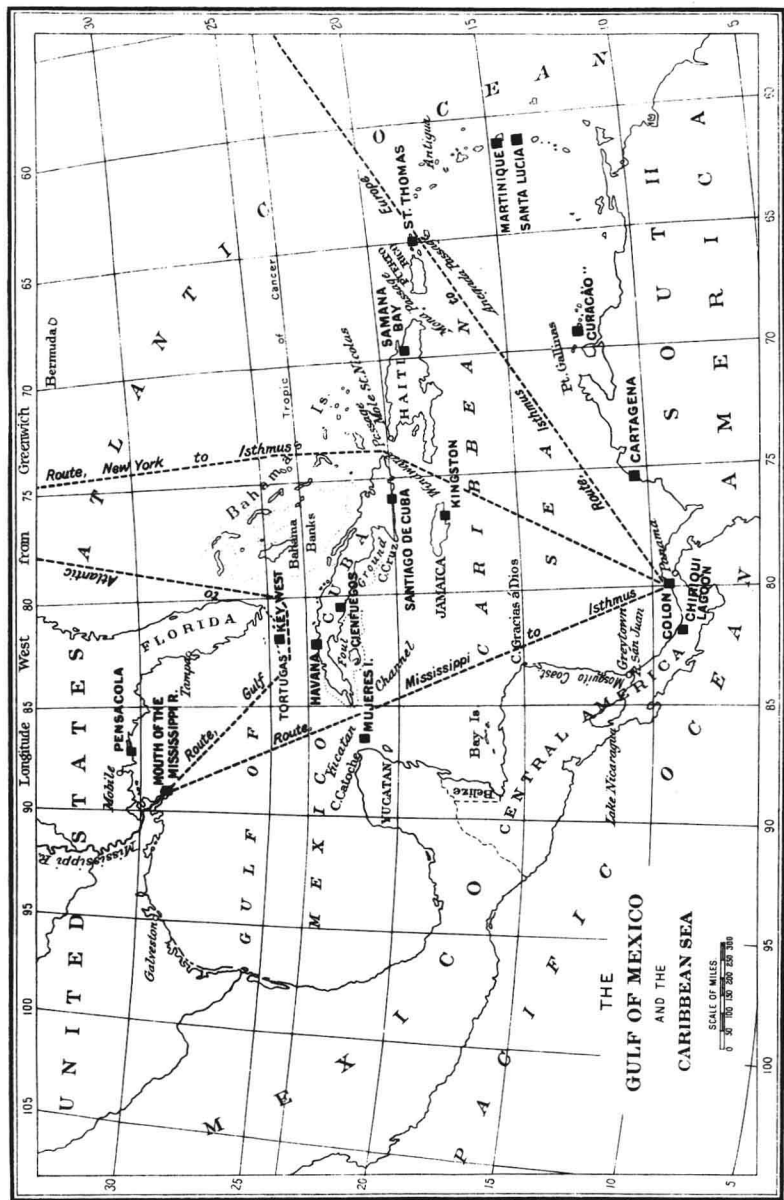
The Caribbean has been of major importance for several reasons. The great inland water transportation system flowing from the Ohio, the Tennessee, the Arkansas, and other rivers into the Mississippi in effect makes the American heartland a part of the Caribbean arena. The water transportation routes both from the Gulf ports and through the Panama Canal are of major significance for security and economic reasons. In the latter part of the twentieth century some 45 percent of all U.S. imports and exports, 55 percent of crude oil imports, and 60 percent of supplies for the North Atlantic Treaty Organization pass through the Caribbean. In addition, 65 percent of all ships transiting the Panama Canal carry goods to or from the United States. In short, the nation that controls the Caribbean controls the United States.

The trade connection predates the American Revolution and has developed into an important element in the economies of many of the Caribbean islands as well as the United States. The United States now imports a wide variety of products assembled in the area, such as baseballs, electronic goods, and clothing. In addition, traditional agricultural products such as bananas and sugar still constitute important elements in U.S.-Caribbean commerce. The area receives a variety of things from the United States, including thousands of tourists—a temporary but profitable import. American investments have played a significant role in economic development, perhaps more for the islands and some companies than for the U.S. economy overall. The massive Cuban nationalization of American companies did not have much effect on the economic well-being of the United States. Some U.S. companies have developed significant branch factories in places like Puerto Rico and the Dominican Republic, and under the auspices of the Caribbean Basin Initiative the economies of the Caribbean and the United States will probably continue to become more integrated.

The Caribbean involvement of the United States has tended to receive harsh treatment from some academic critics, usually of the liberal-left persuasion. In their eyes the United States has not transformed the region into some kind of paradise and has “perverted” its development by somehow forcing it into a mold that only benefits the United States. Without the United States, the Caribbean would be much poorer in all respects.

Have the policies of the United States been successful? In the long run I think that the answer is yes. Anthony Lake, who served in the State Department in the 1970s, has written that almost all foreign policies are compromises and not the product of some “grand strategic design.” As a result, “Success in foreign policy is seldom absolute triumph. It is usually the achievement of modest progress, or the avoidance of disaster.”³ This is a reasonable conclusion for the Caribbean. The region is generally free from foreign control and influence, and the type that remains is quite benevolent and voluntary. The Cayman Islands, for example, contentedly remain part of the British Commonwealth. The Caribbean area has more freedom, democracy, and general respect for human rights (with the exception of Cuba and Haiti) than at any time since the Spanish Conquest. And the pre-Conquest, Caribbean world was no Garden of Eden.

Some argue that the United States has relied too much on military force. Certainly armed intervention has been a factor in U.S. policy, but it has been an off and on type of involvement that has always been characterized by the voluntary withdrawal of U.S. forces—usually after a fairly short period of time. Sometimes the military has been intelligently used and sometimes not. It is a mixed picture. Some military interventions have solved nothing, others have accomplished a great deal. Eternal peace has not come to the area, and never will, but there is a reasonable amount of stability and peace in the area. Thomas Paine best characterized the overall U.S. approach when he wrote, “I am thus far a Quaker that I would gladly agree with all the world to lay aside the use of arms and settle matters by negotiations; but unless the whole world will, the matter ends, and I take up my musket and THANK HEAVEN He has put it on my power.” And so to the story at hand.⁴



From Captain A. T. Mahan, *The Interest of America in Sea Power: Present and Future* (1898), 269-70.

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chapter 1

CARIBBEAN INTERESTS AND U.S. POLICY TO 1945

It was the height of the fever season in July 1741 when the British navy, under the command of Vice Admiral Edward Vernon, reached the coast of Cuba. Vernon's objective was the port and capital city of St. Iago (later Santiago); the setting was the War of Jenkin's Ear (the British Parliament used the loss of smuggler Robert Jenkin's ear, in an engagement with the Spanish navy off the Florida coast, as a pretext to declare war on Spain), which was another chapter in the struggle between Great Britain, France, and Spain—the latter two nations usually allies—to establish colonies in the Western Hemisphere. The Caribbean had become one of the major arenas of conflict in this war that was waged intermittently for over a century.

The British Colonies in North America became enmeshed in this strategic conflict, and some 3,600 colonials from North America were part of Admiral Vernon's force. Governor Gooch of Virginia praised the expedition as a "holy war against Spanish power in the West Indies," and a colonial officer named Lawrence Washington was so proud of his service with the admiral that on his return he named his Potomac River estate Mount Vernon—his younger brother, George, would later inherit it. But the expedition was a total failure, and out of some 1,500 volunteers from New England only 150 returned. The rest died of tropical diseases.¹

Yet in 1762, during the French and Indian War, the British once more asked for colonial volunteers. By obscuring the destination of the new expedition, the British obtained 4,000 men from four colonies, who joined Admiral George Pocock's force of 11,000 regulars and 40 warships. In June 1762 they were part of the assault on Havana, Cuba. The Spaniards surrendered on 11

August, and there were only seven American casualties. When the expedition departed in October, however, almost half the Americans had died of tropical diseases.²

By 1776 the Caribbean had become identified in the minds of North Americans as an area of strategic/military interest and a source of potential military threat because the region was virtually a European-controlled lake. Thus Americans had become part of the Caribbean power struggle even before gaining their independence.

In like manner, British North America developed extensive economic ties with the West Indies. As early as 1662 New Englanders were cutting logwood trees on the coast of Yucatán and the Bay of Campeche. By 1715 Boston merchants dominated the logwood trade. Despite opposition from British authorities, merchant shippers from New York, New England, Pennsylvania, and Baltimore steadily increased their trade in the Caribbean. After the British occupation of Havana, some 1,067 ships from New York alone entered Havana harbor in 1763. By 1775 close to 40 percent of all ships leaving the ports of New York and Boston sailed directly to the British West Indies. In 1767 some 2,000 vessels cleared through American ports for all parts of the West Indies.

By the mid-eighteenth century Caribbean trade played an important role in the prosperity of British North America, providing one of the few sources of hard currency for the colonials. This trade increasingly strained the limits of mercantilistic regulation, however—especially for New England's trade in slaves, molasses, sugar, and rum. The Spanish and French West Indies became a cheaper source of molasses for the some 150 rum distilleries of New England. When Britain from 1763 onward tried to force the Colonies to abide by the Navigation Acts and to confine their trade to the British Empire, the colonists started the conflict that led to war and independence. Before 1776 Caribbean trade had been established as an important element in the interests of North Americans.

The Caribbean also played an important role during the War of Independence. Santo Domingo served as a supply base for shipments of arms and munitions to the Continental Army even before the Franco-American treaty of 1778. The same island also served as the base of operations for the French fleet that helped trap General Cornwallis's army at Yorktown in 1781. Spain opened its Cuban ports to trade with North Americans in 1778 and used these as bases to attack the British in Florida.

From its beginning the government of the United States saw the Caribbean as important to its national interests. John Adams wrote to Robert Livingston in 1783 that "our natural share in the West India trade is all that is now wanting to complete the plan of happiness and prosperity of our country. Deprived of it we shall be straitened and shackled in some degree. We cannot enjoy a free use of all our limbs without this; with it I see nothing to desire, nothing to vex or chagrin our people, nothing to interrupt our repose or keep up a dread of war."³

Unfortunately, Adams saw his hopes and expectations shattered after the war. The British closed their West Indies colonies to American ships, and even