

Basil A. Reid (ed.), *Caribbean Heritage*. Mona, Jamaica: University of the West Indies Press, 2012. ISBN 978-976-640-264-8. (CLOTH), 404 pp.

Cultural Heritage is a resource from which we draw for understanding of ourselves, our societies and our world. It is not static or fixed but is constantly being reworked, and understood in new ways and critiqued as well as augmented. At the same time as we come to recognize the diversity of every society and culture; in this age of globalization, interactions among societies especially with the powerful economic and media giants in the North and Global South, have caused rapid social and cultural changes in many parts of the world. As part of its mandate, UNESCO has included cultural dialogue and the preservation of cultural diversity. This was reflected in the adoption of the Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage in October 2003 (UNESCO/UNU 2004, 42-47). However even this international body admits that “the acceleration of globalization has made it far more challenging and complex for UNESCO to fulfill this part of its mandate.”¹ Many countries around the world have taken steps to preserve their tangible cultural heritage through the restoration of and re-education about various historical monuments and sites because they have come to understand and appreciate the importance of cultural heritage. In similar vein, in the Caribbean we also need to work actively to preserve our rich and diverse and complex historical and cultural heritage but at the same time to interrogate the established knowledge surrounding this. This is necessary to develop an approach that critically draws upon and appropriates “culture” and “heritage”, both complex phenomena, for various social, economic and political uses.

This anthology, *Caribbean Heritage*, reawakens the debate and sheds new perspectives on what constitutes the cultural legacy of our region. It is not easy to pinpoint a definition of heritage and the editor articulates this in the introduction, stating that dictionary definitions of heritage do not capture the depth and breadth of the concept. This text seeks to add to the debate by providing its own definition of the subject. *Caribbean Heritage* comprises 25 chapters divided into five themes, reflecting the multidimensional approach taken by the editor in interrogating the region’s heritage. Despite the diverse content of the volume, the book functions as a coherent whole displaying the breadth of scholarly work that could be encapsulated under the theme of “heritage.” This is a fitting way of presenting Caribbean heritage to the reader as indeed, the preservation and management of cultural heritage is an interdisciplinary project which must involve the collaborative work archaeologists,

¹ United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization. Globalization and Intangible Cultural Heritage International Conference, p.17. <http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0014/001400/140090e.pdf>.

architects, historians, anthropologists, sociologists, ethnographers, linguists, biochemists, and engineers among others.

This volume also manifests the recognition that culture should be understood as both intangible as in worldviews, cosmologies, identities, and ideologies as well as tangible or material as in artefacts, buildings, artwork, architecture etc. It is in this context therefore that we welcome this publication, *Caribbean Heritage* which is organized along these lines. Part 1 of *Caribbean Heritage* addresses the theme of intangible heritage. Each author submits a relevant contemporary contribution to this theme. For example, Bridget Brereton in her article “Our Cross to Bear: The Trinity Cross; Heritage and Identity in Trinidad and Tobago” (pp.46-57) addresses the intricacies of the controversy which developed when the name of the country’s highest award, the Trinity Cross, was challenged. Brereton’s investigation reveals that central to the Trinity Cross debate was the impact of the eminent change in the award on the people’s perception of their identity. She presents the competing debates on identity expressed in the opinions of members of the public who perceived that they would be affected by this change. This reminds us that the discourse on heritage cannot be divorced from the people who inherit it and whose lives and identities are shaped by it. Heritage is about who we are and from whence we have emerged. The question of heritage is therefore often a contested arena.

Another feature of the first section of this book is the discussion of oral traditions which may seem to have faded in light of an ever-changing and increasingly virtual world. The chapter, “The Role of Proverbs in Caribbean Education,” written by Ian Robertson and Beverly Anne Carter (117-129), presents parallel comparisons of various proverbs across Caribbean countries which are similar in word or meaning as a means of illustrating shared lived experiences of people throughout the Caribbean. This is an example of *Caribbean* heritage in a very real sense as it points to some common worldviews that permeate the region. One can suggest that herein may lie the seeds of a Caribbean cosmology or a range of cosmologies, although this too could probably be contested on a number of fronts. They do not stop here but also present a convincing argument for preserving these proverbs by passing them on to future generations through the formal education system.

Caribbean Heritage does not exclude literature about individuals who have made noteworthy contributions to the region. Although Part 2 only highlights two individuals among the many who could have possibly been included, it does justice, in as much as the book allows, in paying tribute to these extraordinary people. The first of these is the feminist, social worker and legislator, Audrey Jeffers in the chapter by Innette Cambridge (175-194). Jeffers’ complex legacy in Trinidad and Tobago and throughout the Caribbean is captured in the phrase “lead by example” Jeffers was the

founder of the Coterie of Social Workers which was the leading organization of “black and coloured” middle-class women of the 1920s-1940s. The Coterie championed many diverse causes such as women’s rights, secondary education for girls and even the introduction of women police. Audrey Jeffers also tackled employment discrimination against educated black women in her day and challenged the male-dominated political system. Through the Coterie she also established social work programmes focused on women and children, with legacies such the school feeding programme and day nurseries for working mothers, making her an integral part of our heritage. What is clear from this section is that the people of the Caribbean have a heritage of giving back to their country and region regardless of their status or, as in the case of George James Christian, their location. Few laypersons in the Caribbean are aware of George James Christian originally from the island of Dominica, a prominent lawyer trained in Gray’s Inn, London. Most do not know of his involvement in the Pan-African Movement, his central role in shaping the Ashanti region of Ghana as a member of the Legislative Council of the then Gold Coast 1930-1940. The chapter by Margaret Rouse-Jones and Estelle Appiah (195-206) therefore seeks to fill this gap. This understanding of the legacy and contribution of these two individuals to often unaddressed areas most certainly has expanded the vista of our Caribbean heritage.

Part 3 ventures into another dimension of Caribbean heritage by addressing the natural environment and use of plants and foods. Each article succinctly contributes to this theme. The sea, in particular the Caribbean Sea and the Atlantic Ocean, are defining features of the Caribbean experience and identity. The historical, cultural and ritual significance of the sea is highlighted in this section. Medicinal and food plants in the Caribbean have been part of the traditions passed down through generations. Dating back to the earliest inhabitants of the region, these remedies and indigenous uses of food and plants have persisted although adapted over time. Therefore, it is understandable that a special space ought to be reserved for the inclusion of the natural environment, plants and food in a volume on Caribbean heritage. What the articles in this section—Gobin (209-219); Rooks and Barclay (220-235), Rooks (236-250 and Roberts-Nkrumah (251-275)—make clear is that the traditional uses of plants and food should not remain a relic of the past but should find their way into modern life and industry in the Caribbean. Answers to modern medical issues, food security and economic challenges may be answered by these age-old traditions and our natural environment, if treated as valuable assets of contemporary heritage.

The final two parts of the volume focus on tangible areas of Caribbean Heritage. Part 4 looks at the physical infrastructure, land tenure and built heritage. Griffith-Charles and Lalloo highlight the special relationship to land which has been

passed on from one generation to the other in many Caribbean communities and families. This highlights an indigenous aspect of the cosmology which is often not understood or valued in the modern consumerist and market-driven context. In relation to the legacy of built heritage, the recognition of a design and architectural heritage is important as this has traditionally been underplayed. To lose the majority of the physical heritage sites would signal a loss of a significant part of the Caribbean's heritage as these are reminders of the troubled history of colonial and postcolonial negotiations over labour and power, architecture and design in the territories in which they survive.

There is much that Trinidad and Tobago can learn from other parts of the region such as Barbados, Puerto Rico, Cuba, St. Kitts and Nevis and Jamaica where there is greater recognition of the significance of the built heritage. This is evident from the papers by Pigou-Dennis (293-305) and Wilson (306-314). Drawing on the experience of Guyana, Dolland and Sankat (351-343) draw our attention to industrial heritage which is one aspect of our built heritage; an area needing special attention in some parts of the region. Perhaps because of its historical newness and continued character as a "frontier society," there is still much to accomplish in this regard in Trinidad and Tobago. These articles can raise awareness in the reader and encourage a sense of urgency to preserve, restore and to protect these sites from neglect or overnight destruction.

Part 5 logically moves into archaeology and museology, heritage policy and law, to end this work. Museums have historically reflected the state of the wider society; illustrating how the historical and contemporary political and social dynamics in a society are deeply intertwined. This section reflects on the historical role of museums in the colonial and post-colonial Caribbean (Cummins (367-374) and begins to address larger questions of cultural policy and the combined roles of heritage institutions such as national trusts, archives, museums and academic institutions—Richards (356-366); and Farmer and Cummins (375-383)—a discussion that needs to be continued. The important issue of heritage legislation is also addressed by Richards.

What is excellent about this volume is that various authors provide recommendations on how systems could be improved to include and preserve Caribbean heritage. Almost all of the articles included in this work argue for protecting the diversity of the Caribbean's heritage for posterity. *Caribbean Heritage* brings to the reader a well-integrated blend of intangible and tangible heritage. It shows that heritage does not and should not be limited to a single definition but includes a wide range of areas that may not be part of traditional thought. The miscellany of the past in its varying manifestations and their changing use and

meanings in the present, are shown to be vital parts of Caribbean heritage and this work rightly ensures that it is included.

While reference to a wider span of Caribbean experience would have enhanced this work, the collection still does a good job of including work on a range of countries of the Caribbean region. It would serve as an excellent text for courses on heritage studies at regional and international higher education institutions as well as a useful reference text for practitioners and lay persons who appreciate Caribbean heritage.

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