U.S.-Cuban relations, like so much else involving the island, remains frustratingly uncertain.

It was in this atmosphere of uncertainty that Cubans marked the fortieth anniversary of the revolution on January 1, 1999. In his speech, the seventy-two-year-old Fidel reaffirmed his commitment to saving “the country, the revolution, and the conquest of socialism.” As tourists watched from the balcony of a nearby hotel, he railed against the “new religion” of neoliberalism, which has “turned the planet into a giant casino.” As so often in recent decades, the fate of Cuba seemed to depend on the will of one man.

Smallness is a basic fact of life throughout the Caribbean, an area stretching from the tip of Florida to the coast of Venezuela (see Map 3). With the exception of Cuba and Hispaniola (comparable to the state of Maine), the islands tend to be modest in size; the Grenadines, the Bahamas, and the Cayman Islands are absolutely miniscule. Topographies vary from the flat plains of Barbados to the rugged coasts of Martinique and Guadeloupe. A few of the islands, like Cuba and Jamaica, have rolling hills and substantial mountain ranges. In general the climate is mild, rainfall is abundant, and soil is adequate. Here the power of nature is clearly and constantly evident, from beautiful scenery to destructive forces—hurricanes, volcanoes, earthquakes, and floods.

The northernmost and larger islands of Cuba, Jamaica, Puerto Rico, and Hispaniola (now shared by Haiti and the Dominican Republic) are known as the Greater Antilles. The smaller islands to the east are known as the Lesser Antilles—also as the Leeward and Windward Islands.

Although the Caribbean was inhabited well before the arrival of Europeans, the size of the indigenous population is still subject to debate. By most accounts there were probably around 750,000 inhabitants, about two-thirds of them on the island of Hispaniola. There were three different groups: Ciboney or Guanahatabey, Taíno Arawak, and Carib (from which the region gets its name). These pre-Columbian peoples were the first victims of the crises and transitions resulting from conquest and colonization by European powers.

The arrival of Columbus and his three little ships in 1492 signaled the inexorable doom of the area’s native inhabitants and the insertion of the Caribbean into the world arena of European competition. But this entrance was by no means abrupt. Spain exercised a monopoly over the region for more than a century, until rival European powers were prepared to issue a challenge.
The Colonial Period: Conquest and Competition

Columbus landed on the island of Hispaniola in December 1492 and christened it La Española. The original intention of his voyage had been to replicate the advantageous commercial linkage which the Portuguese had established with the Far East. Expansion to the New World would thus yield exchange in new commodities, and Spain would become a first-rate trading nation. However, the absence of great civilizations and the prevailing conditions of production soon convinced the newcomers that they would have to change their strategy. And as Columbus observed, the local inhabitants were of generous disposition—and well equipped to serve the Spanish crown.

Unable to develop significant trade, the Spaniards chose to exploit the island as a source of land and labor through the encomienda system. Semi-feudal institutions were imposed upon the native society. Indians were put to work in mines and fields. Harsh labor conditions and physical contact with Spaniards led to their decimation; disease and debilitation took a staggering toll. Realizing what fate held in store, many fled to the mountains in search of safety and freedom.

It was in the Caribbean where clerics first protested against abuse of the natives. In 1511 Antonio de Montesinos shocked a congregation in Santo Domingo by denouncing maltreatment of the Indian population. Soon afterward Bartolomé de las Casas began his fervent campaign to protect the Indians from adventurers and conquerors. In response to these pleas, the crown ultimately agreed to regulate the treatment of the native population. But to protect the American natives, Las Casas also made a fateful suggestion: that Spain import African slaves as a source of necessary labor. Thus began the tragic history of forced migration from the western coast of Africa. Of the 10 to 15 million people sent to the New World as slaves, approximately 2 million found their way to the Caribbean—where they would work on sugar plantations, alter the racial composition of the area, and, ultimately, help to establish foundations for the Industrial Revolution in nineteenth-century Europe.

In no other region of the Americas was the destruction of the native population as complete as in the Caribbean. Some Indians managed to escape to the mountains, as in Cuba, but in most places geography was an impediment. The islands were so small that there was nowhere to hide. As in New France and New England, the native population fell victims to virtual elimination.

Aboard the ships came the way of life, the language, the creeds, and political institutions of contemporary Europe. One of the vessels brought some sugarcane cuttings from the Canary Islands (as others had brought domestic animals and plants), and this altered the course of history. Sugarcane grew bountifully, but as prospects for sugar production rose, the need for labor became all the more apparent. The demand for slaves seemed almost infinite: as one seventeenth-century witness observed, there
was need "for at least eighty to one hundred Negroes, working all the time, and even one-hundred and twenty or more." Sugarcane and Africans came together to disrupt socioeconomic organization and to transform the Caribbean into the new frontier of sixteenth-century Europe.

The discovery of precious minerals in Mexico and Peru promptly distracted Spain's attention from the Caribbean, which became little more than a stopping place on the way to the now-prosperous mainland. Hispaniola, Cuba, and Puerto Rico served as supply stations and military garrisons for the increasing number of ships loaded with gold and silver from the Mexican and Peruvian mines. This income from the New World created the myth of a wealthy Spain, but the long-term reality was that this windfall weakened the mother country—and created temptations for European rivals.

Though the Spanish crown proclaimed authority over the entire Caribbean, it was unable to sustain a commercial and political monopoly. The area was simply too large, royal forces and settlements too thinly dispersed, and the economic stakes too high. By the late sixteenth century and throughout the seventeenth century, the Caribbean Sea was an open and inviting target for privateers and buccaneers, who raided coastal settlements and pursued the royal fleets. Spain's European rivals, especially England, encouraged and sometimes outfitted these pirates; Francis Drake, John Hawkins, and Henry Morgan all became knights of the English realm.

European powers established settlements as well. The English seized Jamaica in 1655. The French took the western half of Hispaniola in 1679. Having occupied northeastern Brazil from 1630 to 1664, the Dutch then moved onto a number of islands off the coast of Venezuela. Little by little, Spain ceded or accepted de facto loss of some of its colonial claims. Caribbean holdings became pawns in European wars, handed back and forth between winners and losers like the proceeds in a poker game.

Meanwhile the demand for sugar was steadily increasing in Europe. Soon the cultivation of sugar not only dominated trade from the Caribbean (controlled largely by the English, Dutch, and French) but profoundly affected the agricultural and racial composition of the islands. In time the islands became overwhelmingly populated by people of African descent—a situation that persists to this day. Only in the larger Spanish islands of Puerto Rico and Cuba, where the emphasis on sugar came relatively late, did those of African origin fail to become a majority.

Another consequence of sugarcane cultivation was the transformation of once-diversified systems of production into single-product economies, emphasizing sugar for export. Most of their consumption needs had to be imported, from other islands, the mainland, or Spain itself. Only on the smaller islands, such as Grenada, were other products (in this case coffee) more important than sugar. Since most of the original population had died and Spanish settlers did not like to work with their hands, the demand for slaves continued through the eighteenth century.

Of course, the slave trade became highly profitable, and sugar from the New World created a demand for European products that later helped to stimulate the Industrial Revolution. Sugar became the king of the Caribbean until, like other primary products, it faced stiff competition from other parts of the world (including the U.S. South). By the 1850s Cuba alone could produce almost all the sugar needed for export to Europe. The invention of the modern mill, or ingenio, with its use of steam and mechanization, decreased the need for slave labor and ultimately set the stage for the abolition of slavery (though planters in Cuba and Puerto Rico remained recalcitrant to the last). By the end of the nineteenth century sugar no longer ruled supreme. With its demise the imperial strategists of great-power Europe turned away from the Caribbean to focus on more lucrative areas of expansion, such as India and Southeast Asia.

The political legacies of conquest and colonization would be complex. With so many European masters, the islands of the Caribbean would have diverse legal and cultural traditions. They would achieve independence at different times and through various means. As we shall see, Haiti would break away from France by 1804; some of the British possessions would not acquire sovereignty until the 1960s and 1970s. Some have been struggling with the challenges of nationhood for nearly 200 years; others are even now following the same generation of leaders who first brought them independence.

Apart from Cuba and Haiti, none of the possessions of the Caribbean engaged in a protracted war for liberation. Because of their small size and geography, they never developed military establishments. As colonies, they could rely on the military might of their mother countries; as islands, they were at least partly protected from hostile invasions by the sea. With the exception of Haiti and the Dominican Republic, independent nations of the Caribbean have not endured the kind of military domination so apparent in nineteenth- and twentieth-century mainland Latin America.

Finally, the smallness and the poverty of Caribbean islands would keep their governments from becoming strong; unlike the powerful state machines recently evident in Chile or Mexico, they would be chronically weak. With scant resources and modest populations, they would actually constitute "mini-states." Such vulnerability would, in turn, create imposing challenges for this promising but convoluted part of the world.

Overview: Economic Growth and Social Change

The preeminence of sugar in the Caribbean and the requirements for labor led to a continuing threat of worker scarcity. Attempting to delineate a suitable demographic policy for the New World, the Spanish crown tried a number of alternatives. Spain sent convicts and white slaves; allowed for free emigration to the colonies; and enslaved the native Indians, though this led to their decimation. It was the African slave trade that kept sugar in its place of privilege throughout the colonial era.
All other crops became secondary activities. Economic diversification, such as it was, stemmed in part from geographic realities. In the more mountainous islands, such as Guadeloupe, sugar cultivation was difficult, so bananas and other products were raised. Tobacco appeared on small farms among the rolling hills of Cuba and on some other islands. But the rush to profit from the production of sugarcane caused the diversion of most of the flatlands into vast plantations, a tendency that reached its most extravagant point in Barbados, whose residents had to import almost their entire food supply.

The loosely organized society of the sixteenth century, dominated by whites and small household production units, gave way to a strictly organized and hierarchical society of masters and slaves by the seventeenth century. Production was firmly controlled by the mother countries. With the exception of England, each European country formed its own trading company; in addition to the Casa de Contratación of Spain, there were the Dutch West Indies Company and the French Compagnie des Îles d'Amérique.

Perhaps the primary social consequence of these transformations was the creation of a rigid system of racial stratification. Virtually everywhere a three-tiered pyramid existed: whites at the top, blacks in the middle, and blacks at the bottom. As whites eventually withdrew and Indians disappeared, the African heritage became dominant. This pattern would have long-run effects on race relations in the region, and would sharply distinguish the Caribbean from mainland areas with large and persisting indigenous populations (such as Mexico and Peru).

European demand for sugar permitted many of the settlers to make large fortunes, which they used to build great manorial houses and to purchase acceptance into the political and social life of the mother country. As on the mainland, the colonists never felt at ease on the islands; most longed to return home, and, in fact, some went back to positions of power and prominence. If there appeared a plantation aristocracy in some parts of the Caribbean, it was not a deeply rooted one.

The emphasis on sugar not only destroyed the once-diversified local economies but also consolidated the dependence on a single market. Most trade would take place with the mother country alone. In this way the agricultural production of the New World came into contact with the emerging manufacturing centers of Europe. By the twentieth century, most Caribbean trade would be with the United States.

Exploitation led to occasional rebellion by slaves, some of whom took to the mountains and created runaway "maroon" communities. (The term apparently comes from the Spanish word for a runaway steer, cazarrín, later used to mean fugitive in general.) From there they would raid plantations for goods, arms, and even women. White planters responded to this threat with a combination of persuasion, negotiation, and paramilitary force.

As sugar production declined and the population grew, countries in the Caribbean began making efforts to diversify their economic bases. Coconuts, spices, bananas, citrus fruits, and pineapples have acquired an increased role in agricultural production. Sugar remains a major export for Jamaica and the Dominican Republic. In countries such as Jamaica and Trinidad and Tobago, two mineral commodities—bauxite and petroleum—have gained prominence. Other islands now have viable industries in textiles, manufacturing, financial services, assembly plants, and tourism. For some of these activities represent the principal source of foreign exchange.

However, these industries do not provide much employment, and, outside of postwar Puerto Rico, manufacturing has not played a major role in the area. The scarcity of job opportunities has led to a massive outmigration—to other islands, to the United States, and to parts of Europe. Indeed, some have said that the Caribbean exports not only its products but also its people. As a result, the islands of the Caribbean have never formed an industrial working class. Here, in contrast to such nations as Argentina and Brazil, there is hardly any proletariat.

The Caribbean mini-states remain largely rural as well. There are no major cities; Santo Domingo, by far the largest, had just over 2.1 million inhabitants by the mid-1990s. Most people live in the countryside. About three-quarters of the population of Haiti and over half of the population of Jamaica still reside in communities with less than 2000 inhabitants. The Caribbean has neither the problems nor the amenities of modern city life.

As a result of all these developments, societies in the Caribbean are relatively "classless." With blacks as the predominant cultural element and with still-underdeveloped economies, these tend to be homogeneous societies. The French tradition, perhaps most evident in Haiti and the Dominican Republic, but the kind of ethnic aristocracy that characterized the colonial era no longer exists. This fact is expressed in a bitter joke: "All Caribbeans have equal access to their fair share of poverty."

In confronting the challenges of economic and social development, the Caribbean has witnessed two dominant experiences or models: those of Puerto Rico and Cuba. Under the name of "Operation Bootstrap," the Puerto Rican model began in the early 1960s as an example for not only the Caribbean but for all of Latin America: its pillars were close cooperation with the United States and reliance on foreign investment. Although there were some impressive statistical achievements, the model revealed inherent weaknesses as unemployment swelled, and growing numbers of Puerto Ricans migrated to New York and other parts of the United States.

The Cuban model, described in Chapter Eight, entailed the construction of a socialist "command" economy. Despite its social achievements, the political and economic costs have discouraged acceptance as a revolutionary example by other countries in the area. Instead, there have been efforts to find a third alternative—one attempt was made on Jamaica and another on the tiny island of Grenada. Both of these would fail.

Social and economic development in the Caribbean has remained under international influence ever since the sixteenth century. The idea of a common organization to unify the region and to consolidate develop-
mental gains took form in the creation of the Caribbean Community and Common Market (CARICOM). Long subject to internal ideological and political fragmentation, CARICOM has shown signs of revitalization in the 1990s. In an additional display of solidarity, island nations (including Cuba) joined with neighbors in Middle America and northern South America in the mid-1990s to form the Association of Caribbean States.

**Haiti: Slave Republic, Voodoo Dictatorship**

What is now Haiti, on the island of Hispaniola, was once one of the most prosperous overseas possessions of France; today it is one of the poorest countries in the world. With a population of about 7.5 million, Haiti has an annual per capita income of only $330.

The island's original inhabitants were almost entirely replaced by African slaves imported to work on sugar estates. During the French Revolution Haiti's residents were granted full citizenship, a move that white estate owners resisted. Resulting conflicts led to a wave of rebellions. This time the slaves wanted not only personal freedom but national independence as well.

Under the leadership of Toussaint L'Ouverture, the blacks of Haiti revolted in 1791 and in 1804 declared national sovereignty. This was to be the second free nation in the Americas and the first independent black republic in the world. Although Toussaint led the rebellion he was persuaded to go to France, where he eventually died in an obscure dungeon. It was one of his lieutenants, Jean Jacques Dessalines, who proclaimed the country to be free from colonial rule.

The Wars of Independence broke up and destroyed the large sugar estates. Land was at first worked collectively under a system called the corvee, but the highly individualistic tendencies of the postwar period led to disfranchisement of parcels to freeholders. Thus the legacy of large oligarchic landowners, so prevalent elsewhere in Latin America, did not take root in independent Haiti. Instead, a large number of small holdings replaced the sugar estates, and production decreased drastically. Modern sugar technology has not been suited to small farms and as a result Haiti did not reproduce the economic innovations of turn-of-the-century Cuba.

The country has experienced repeated civil war and foreign intervention. Independence gave power to the blacks, who now form about 90 percent of the population, a fact that light-skinned mulattoes have resented all along. Indeed, the mulattoes constitute a prosperous minority, still clinging to an ideal of French civilization and speaking French on a regular basis. The majority black population, by contrast, speaks a native language, Creole, and finds spiritual inspiration in voodoo, an eclectic blend of Dahomian religions and Catholicism. Ever since the colonial era a kind of caste system has divided the mulattoes from the blacks, and conflict between the two elements has been a persisting theme in Haitian history.

Internal tension produced increasing instability. From 1804 to 1867 Haiti had only ten chief executives. From 1867 to 1915 there were sixteen presidents, with an average term of only three years. And from 1911 to 1915 Haiti faced one of its most chaotic periods, during which six presidents met violent deaths.

Confronting World War I and accustomed to "dollar diplomacy," the United States occupied Haiti in 1915 and stayed there until 1934. The invading troops were charged with the general administration of the country. One of their first tasks was to abolish the army and to replace it by a national police force. The financial administration of the country was entrusted to a cadre of technicians and bureaucrats, who ensured payments of all foreign debt obligations (especially those owed to the United States). Some new public works were initiated and old ones were repaired, but the majority of the population regarded the invaders with smoldering resentment.

One reason for this feeling was dismay over the loss of sovereignty, as the United States took over the management of the country and even the administration of the customshouses. (In fact the financial commission would not leave Haiti until 1941, years after the departure of the military garrisons.) Another reason was the marked preference of U.S. officials for the mulattoes, whom they brought to power in a variety of ways—including the superficial election and reelection of Sénén Vincent as president in 1935.

In time the black population, backed by the Haitian Guard (as the police force was known), ousted another mulatto president and installed Duvalier Estimé in 1946. He replaced mulatto officials with blacks and undertook a series of reforms designed to benefit both urban workers and agricultural producers. Estimé discharged the country's debt to the United States and signed an agreement with the Export-Import Bank for the development of the Artibonite Valley. In 1950 he tried to have the constitution amended so he could remain in power, and for this he was deposed by the army and sent into exile.

Control passed to Colonel Paul F. Magloire, a black leader who was influential within the army and popular among the nation's masses. At his inauguration he promised to safeguard the rights guaranteed by the constitution, to continue irrigation projects and other public works, and to promote improved education. In the international arena Magloire sought good relations with the United States, while the increase in export prices brought on by the Korean War helped to stimulate economic growth. Restored by a group of ambitious rivals, he was overthrown in a coup in 1956.

After months of uncertainty there emerged the figure of François Duvalier, who had himself elected president in September 1957. So began one of the most backward, unfortunate, and tyrannical periods in the history of this land.

Soon after seizing power Duvalier set out to bend the nation to his will. The army, the police, and the security forces became accountable to him.
alone. He created a special police force which came to be known as the Tontons Macoutes, the most dreaded repressive force in the country. Through sheer terror he rid himself of his opponents and maneuvered elections to become president for life (président à vie).

A proponent of marxism, a movement that looked to Africa for inspiration, Duvalier expelled mulattoes from the national bureaucracy. He assumed near-total control of the state, and it is said that he himself appointed members of the security police. He gained influence over the masses by canny associating himself with the figure of Baron Samedi, the earthy keeper of the voodoo tombs. He created a sort of latter-day court, whose favorites gained riches through the dispensation of state favors. To institutionalize a system of kickbacks, Duvalier even set up an umbrella organization, the Movement for National Renovation, which collected contributions from business and high government employees for the ostensible purpose of building public facilities. Needless to say, the money was never used for such ends.

Until his death in 1971 Duvalier took the side of the United States most international arenas, including the United Nations and the Organization of American States. On occasion pro-U.S. votes would lead to increased aid or loans for his corrupt regime. During his tenure Haiti became more and more isolated, a kind of international pariah, notwithstanding his personal desire to establish stronger ties with Africa.

What the dictator really wanted was the opportunity to rule Haiti according to his own design. Ill-starred invasions by revolutionary forces took place from time to time but always ended in failure. Their principal source of support came from the instability of the regime, which “Papa Doc” Duvalier continued to dominate through a combination of fear and mystification. Each attack from abroad led to more brutal repression and to propagation of the official slogan: Dieu, Duvalier et le fracas, un et indivisible—God, Duvalier, and the crash, one and indivisible.

As death neared, Duvalier persuaded the National Assembly to lower the minimum age for president from forty to eighteen and proceeded to install his son as his successor and président à vie. Why he selected his son instead of his daughter Marie-Denise, with whom he had a closer relationship, remains a source of mystery and speculation.

Young Jean-Claude Duvalier, or “Baby Doc” as he was sometimes know inherited a bitterly impoverished country. Though he took some steps to improve development and may have been less brutal than his father, he retained a parasitical group of favorities—a “kleptocracy” of sorts. Government became the means of self-enrichment. His marriage to a wealthy mulatto woman led to some dissatisfaction among his father’s supporters. Political disaffection and internecine struggles continued to mount and finally led to his demise in February 1986, when he boarded a U.S. Air Force plane and departed for France.

He left behind an anguished nation. Between 1980 and 1986 the economy had shrunk by 10 percent. Three out of four adults could not read one out of every five children died before the age of five. Thirty years of rule by the Duvaliers had made Haiti the poorest country in the Western Hemisphere.

Political recovery was tentative. For decades the opposition had been suppressed, labor unions controlled, and the media corrupted. As Baby Doc left the country, there were cries for liberty and calls for dechristianization; “uprooting” of the Duvalier regime: tombs and statues fell, policemen fi popular wrath, and collaborators with the dictatorship fled from office. A national government was formed under Lieutenant General Henri Namphy, a seemingly apolitical officer—who had, however, served as army chief of-staff under Duvalier. Elections scheduled for late 1987 resulted in bloodbath, as parapolitical forces assailed voters and opposition candidates. A subsequent ballot resulted in the controversial election of Jean-Bertrand Aristide, a well-known social scientist, but Namphy threw him out of office in the spring of 1988. He himself was soon replaced by General Prosper Avril, an ambitious young military officer who revived the Tontons Macoutes.
and imposed a wave of repression. To many observers it appeared that Haiti was suffering from "Duvalier without Duvalier."

Authentic change began in 1990. Early in the year protest demonstrations and a general strike persuaded General Ayril to leave the country. Under a woman interim president, Ertha Pascal-Trouillot, open elections took place in December 1990. Emerging with two-thirds of the vote was Jean-Bertrand Aristide, a Roman Catholic priest who espoused liberation theology and advocated far-reaching political and social change. In January 1991 disgruntled "Duvalierists" attempted a military coup to prevent the "Communist" Aristide from taking office; the effort failed but left 74 dead and 156 injured. Since his party did not win even a plurality in the legislature, Aristide had to construct an effective ruling coalition from a position of weakness. Late in 1991, unruly elements within the military ousted him from office. The United States and other nations promptly condemned the coup, and the OAS slapped an embargo on trade with Haiti, but diplomatic negotiations for a peaceful solution to the crisis dragged on for years.

As Haitians sought to escape the oppression imposed by the new military regime of General Raoul Cédras, it was the prospect of a large-scale flood of immigrants that gave shape to U.S. policy. The Coast Guard started picking up thousands of Haitians attempting to reach U.S. shores on homemade rafts, and took them to an encampment at the U.S. naval station at Guantánamo (in Cuba). In May 1992 President George Bush ordered the Coast Guard to return all Haitian rafters to their homeland without any screening for political amnesty. Democratic presidential candidate Bill Clinton denounced the Bush policy as "a callous response to a terrible human tragedy," but then consented to its continuation after the November 1992 election. A UN-sponsored negotiation nearly brought a settlement to the impasse in 1993, but collapsed in the face of defiance from the Cédras regime. By early 1994 leaders of the African-American community mounted sharp criticism of Washington's inaction, and Clinton reversed himself by announcing that U.S. authorities would process rafters at sea and grant asylum to victims of political repression. News of the change led to another wave of rafters. Despite public skepticism, Clinton began to contemplate the use of military force. In mid-September Clinton denounced the Cédras government as "the most violent regime in our hemisphere," and stressed the dangers of inaction: "As long as Cédras rules, Haitians will continue to seek sanctuary in our nation.... Three hundred thousand more Haitians, 5 percent of their entire population, are in hiding in their own country. If we don't act, they could be the next wave of refugees at our door. We will continue to face the threat of a mass exodus of refugees and its constant threat to stability in our region and control of our borders."

As tension mounted, Clinton dispatched a high-level delegation under former president Jimmy Carter for a last-ditch effort at negotiation. At the final minute, as U.S. troops were already en route for an invasion of Haiti, Carter reached an agreement with the Cédras government. Clinton cancel