

Correctly, Bolland says “Belize is so small and its economy is so open, [that] it is largely dependent on the international situation.” That might be said of many countries, but the author later makes clear that Belize is unique in that its very political independence derived from international sanctions involving specific guarantees from the United States, Great Britain, Mexico, and the United Nations. Settlement of the Guatemalan claim to Belize, thought for many years to be a prerequisite to full independence, was never completed. New strategic realities simply bypassed it in a manner reminiscent of the philosopher’s comment that Hegel was never disproven, merely abandoned.

From the historian’s viewpoint, there is one unfortunate bibliographical oversight. The career of Antonio Soberanis, a 1930s labor organizer, is important to the author’s historical analysis of the contemporary scene. Yet Peter Ashdown’s work on Soberanis is not cited. Although Ashdown’s dissertation, “Race, Class and the Unofficial Majority in British Honduras, 1890–1949” (University of Sussex, 1979), which broke new ground, may not have been published, he has published relevant articles. In a work aimed at the general reader, it would have been more useful for the author to cite one of Ashdown’s five publications on Soberanis in *Belizean Studies* (1977–78) rather than three or four documents in the Belize archives. Such a consideration does not change the fact that this is the best historical overview of Belize yet published.

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Panama Money in Barbados, 1900–1920. by BONHAM C. RICHARDSON. Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1986. Illustrations. Figures. Tables. Notes. Bibliography. Index. Pp. xiv, 283. Cloth. \$24.95.

This splendidly written book illustrates how the demand for servile labor, generated by the construction of the Panama Canal between 1900 and 1914, opened up opportunities for the impoverished Caribbean proletariat and marginalized peasantry to an unprecedented degree. Their engagement for the first time in a large-scale, nonagrarian enterprise with American capitalists advanced these groups’ social consciousness in ways that the plantation sector did not. The Panama project, in addition, located geographically in the heart of plantation America, sent shockwaves throughout, and small agrarian societies like Barbados were affected in fundamental ways.

Between 1905 and 1914, some 45,000 black Barbadians from a total population of no more than 200,000 departed for Panama, where they became known as the “Silvermen” in order to differentiate them from the better paid white laborers of Europe and America who were known as the “Goldmen.” This book is a pioneer attempt to analyze how this migration affected the lives of those who stayed behind, and the impact of the migrants’ money remittances on the quality of social

life, economic institutions, and social structure back home. It is therefore more than an exploration in migration analysis: it is also a social history of Barbados in the years when “Panama” supplanted “plantation” in the minds of aspiring black Caribbean peoples.

The author carefully outlines how the Panama project was idealized in the vision of a former slave population that had continued to dwell under the oppressive “totalitarian” political apparatus of a white merchant-planter elite, and how that population sought to redefine the conditions and terms of their reentry and long-term relations within the society. Through exhaustive research into the Barbados archival sources, Richardson presents, with praiseworthy style and balance, the fascinating narrative of people struggling to buy into the mainstream of their own society with “Panama money,” despite the firm conservative grip of the white propertied classes.

The massive and sudden injection of capital into black communities affected land tenure patterns, as well as the financial apparatus of Barbados, in important ways. The emergence of black-owned retail shops, the proliferation of Friendly Societies, and the purchase of some sizable estates by workers illustrate the depth of their adherence to the ideologies of social mobility and property accumulation—Protestant style. The quest for social security and respectability, in what the author describes as the semifeudal Barbadian society, presented the white community with the challenge of consolidating its forces of resistance by deepening their commitment to racial stratification and social apartheid. The result was the whites’ success in containing the disruptive social impact of black capital and the eventual strengthening of their social hegemony.

The social consciousness aspect of this process has been excavated from the minds of the few surviving migrants by imaginative use of oral methodology. These data forcefully illustrate the shortcomings of quantitative treatment, and bring to the fore with a refreshing immediacy the expectations, fears, anxieties, failures, and achievements of an entire generation gripped by the fever of the U.S. quest for easy access to the Pacific. The thousands of black men and women are not seen as statistically identified units of cost and expenditures, but as visible souls searching for their own open ocean, breaking out of the historic entrapment characteristic of the Caribbean world. It is an excellent work in social history, and I hope we will soon be able to read about other Caribbean peoples in other territories who were also attracted by the magnetic force of Panama money, and how they subsequently affected their indigenous socioeconomic structure and ideological climate.

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