Brian Meeks

Critical Interventions in Caribbean Politics and Theory. Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2014. xi + 254 pp. (Cloth US\$65.00)

This book, organized in three parts (“Theoretical Forays,” “Caribbean Questions,” and “Jamaican Journeys”), advances a new aspect of political theory that has not been widely explored: the introduction of musical artists as purveyors of political thought. The opening chapter, which focuses on calypsonian Brother Valentino and reggae singer Pablo Moses, lays the foundation for a critical intervention in Caribbean politics and theory, making an important societal connection that spans the region from Jamaica to Trinidad and Tobago.

This unusual beginning does not detract from the concerns of Brian Meeks’s personal political evolution, which is located in the Grenada Revolution and its failure and was best captured in his 2000 book, *New Caribbean Thought*. Fourteen years later, he has made a significant intellectual breakthrough to let his readers understand the essence of how Caribbean societies had evolved from the heady dreams of independence to become narco-states embroiled in a new globalism, threatening the sovereignty that the founding fathers of Caribbean nationhood stood for. Chapter 13, “The Dudas Events in Jamaica and the Future of Caribbean Politics (2011),” provides enough of an insight into the clash between sovereignty and geopolitics to show how Jamaica got there. The subheading, “Five Phases in Jamaican Politics,” offers an important roadmap, giving readers insight into the postindependence transformation into a narco-state.

The book also clarifies some interesting historical perceptions. In Chapter 7, “Lloyd Best, ‘The People’ and the Road Not Taken in 1970 (2003),” Meeks shares “One Obscure Anecdote” (p. 86) in which he opens up a dialogue about the obvious schism between Lloyd Best and the leaders of the National Joint Action Committee (NJAC) during the February–April 1970 uprisings in Trinidad and Tobago. He carefully analyzes this disconnect between Best and NJAC with the help of a narrative from Ivor Oxaal’s 1971 book, *Race and Revolutionary Consciousness*. While this may seem obscure, it really does penetrate an element of the division among those who were violently opposed to the Eric Williams regime in 1970 that could explain its survival in the face of imminent political demise.

The absence of an intellectual arm of NJAC in 1970, which Best could have filled, allowed Williams to press his own intellectual reset button to advance (as the title of Chapter 7 puts it) “The Chaguaramas Declaration: The People’s Charter Revised” by November 1970, which gave him a new philosophical space that NJAC had failed to fill. Best’s absence from support for NJAC deprived it of an

intellectual dimension, thus denying it the completion of its political and philosophical identity, which Williams exploited. Naturally, Meeks delves into the Jamaican political challenges, and he provides an adequate analysis of those challenges at the celebration of fifty years of independence from Great Britain.

As a book that seeks to examine Afro-Caribbean political thought, its major shortcoming is in failing to examine the emergence of an Indo-Caribbean contribution particularly in Trinidad and Tobago and Guyana. In both countries, the use of cross-ethnic and cross-cultural coalitions have painted a new mosaic in which Indo-Caribbean and Afro-Caribbean multicultural coalitions have successfully negotiated political arrangements that have challenged the traditional single-party hegemonic model. In Trinidad and Tobago, this approach led to the capture of political power by the People's Partnership in 2010—a major challenge to the Afro-dominated state system. In Guyana, the replacement of an Afro-dominated state system in 1992 by the return to power of Cheddi Jagan and the Indo-dominated PPP was challenged by A Partnership for National Unity (APNU), which took control of the National Assembly in coalition with the Alliance for Change (AFC) in 2011, while the PPP/Civic retained control of the presidency. After the book was published, this new coalition took on a more formal character and it acquired power in Guyana in 2015 thereby removing the PPP/Civic from power after twenty-three years and validating the cross-ethnic coalition model as a possible new paradigm in regional politics.

Guyana has now arrived at a cross-ethnic coalition after Afro- and Indo-domination for the first forty-nine years of its postindependence evolution. The next step in Caribbean political analysis must examine the emergence of this political phenomenon of cross-ethnic political coalitions in Trinidad and Tobago and Guyana. In between, there was also the use of the coalition method in St. Kitts-Nevis, which allowed change to be effected there when a single dominant party, the SKLP, was removed from power after twenty years. There were no cross-ethnic issues involved there, but rather cross-island unity that could quell the secessionist tendencies in Nevis depending on the way in which the coalition government discharges its mandate. Nevertheless, the book represents a major contribution to Caribbean political thought and will be useful for those interested in understanding critical aspects of the recent state of play in the philosophical currents of the region.

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