Colin A. Palmer (ed.)

The Legacy of Eric Williams: Caribbean Scholar and Statesman. Kingston: University of the West Indies Press, 2015. 265 pp. (Paper US\$ 45.00)

Of the many books on Eric Williams's voluminous and distinguished scholarship, this is arguably the most useful, mainly because of the quality of the essays and the way they are arranged. The first five chapters deal with Williams's contributions to the historiography of the Caribbean and his role as a nationalist historian-politician. The next four are original and innovative approaches to the "Williams Thesis," i.e., the relationship between slavery and the rise of English capitalism.

The book opens with an introduction by Colin Palmer and then a short but poignant chapter by Arnold Rampersad, who dissects some of the most trenchant critiques of Williams the man and the politician. He concludes by quoting Selwyn Ryan (strangely missing from this collection) that "Williams was not Plato's mythical unblemished Philosopher-King. He was challenged in many ways. On balance, however, his performance was worthy of History's applause" (in *Eric Williams: The Myth and the Man*, 2009, p. 124.)

What follows is an extremely detailed and well-researched essay by Lydia Lindsey about the influence on Williams of London-resident associates such as fellow Trinidadians C.L.R. James and George Padmore. Sadly, the narrative is choppy because the most revealing facts are discussed in the 176 endnotes rather than in the text. Despite this stylistic difficulty, Lindsey's essay puts in doubt Selwyn R. Cudjoe's claim that if we are to understand the major religious and philosophical influences on Williams, "we ought to look no further than his exposition on the works of Rabindranath Tagore, whose philosophical and religious thinking are mirrored in Williams' writings and his life" (p. 77). In fact, Williams took up Tagore late in life and for very programmatic and expedient reasons: as a foil in his political struggle with fundamentalist Hindu politicians in Trinidad. (See Williams's 1969 book, *Inward Hunger*, pp. 271–72, and Selwyn Ryan's, *Eric Williams*, p. 124.)

Colin Palmer's short essay is a competent synthesis of his well-received *Eric Williams and the Making of the Modern Caribbean* (2006), but reflects an intensified sense of frustration with what he calls the "mediocrity" of Caribbean leadership: "Eric Williams imagined a Caribbean with a common future, not the debilitating parochialism and insularity that bedevil the region" (p. 112). Franklin W. Knight goes beyond biography with an erudite comparative *tour d'horizon* of the changing historiography of the Greater Caribbean. There is little to argue with here, except that I admit to being startled by Knight's assertion that Williams's 1969 autobiography, *Inward Hunger*, "may be compared to

Simón Bolívar's famous letter from Jamaica in 1815" (p. 125). In 1969 Williams was penning his autobiography at the height of his power. Bolívar, in 1815, was writing as a defeated leader, bordering on suicide and offering an indifferent Britain Panama and Nicaragua in exchange for war materiel. All in vain.

The book includes some exceptionally fine critiques of, and debates with, the "Williams Thesis." Dale Tomich deals with new insights into the role of slave-produced Cuban sugar in the decline of slavery and the sugar industry in the British West Indies. In a similar way, Ronald Findlay and Kevin Hjortshøj O'Rourke analyze the Triangular Trade in the rise of capitalism and the decline of the West Indian plantation by a persuasive study of sugar in Cuba and cotton in the United States—both slave produced. These two essays stand as testament to the enduring value of Williams's original work as a fundamental reference for scholars exploring new theoretical approaches and new geographical and historical eras.

Further illustrating the theoretical reach of Williams's work is the book's penultimate chapter by Rafael Marquese, which goes beyond the exclusive focus on black labor by describing the role of both black slaves and Italian labor in Brazil's coffee industry and that industry's part in the rise of capitalism. Finally, Joseph E. Inikori argues that one cannot explain the origins and development of the Industrial Revolution solely through studies of national history, or, as he calls it, "mega-history," and that analysis has to be based on the study of "micro-regions" (p. 251). In so doing he makes a telling critique of many cultural interpretations of the rise of capitalism by demonstrating that the Industrial Revolution and its new technologies originated, not in England's centers of the Enlightenment and bourgeois values, but in its socially and economically backward regions. Significantly, this is the only essay that does not contain a single reference to Eric Williams, who is not even cited in Inikori's list of the "major books of the twenty-first century on the subject" (p. 259). Williams connoisseurs will draw their own conclusions about this omission. In my reading, despite its absence the Williams Thesis revealed its silent presence and showed its relevance throughout Inikori's whole essay.

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