Anthony P. Maingot

Race, Ideology, and the Decline of Marxism in the Caribbean. Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2015. 358 pp. (Cloth US\$ 79.95)

In *Race, Ideology, and the Decline of Caribbean Marxism*, Anthony Maingot offers the collective wisdom of a seasoned academic. Written in a lively and accessible style, it reflects his breadth of knowledge of the Greater Caribbean, including its littoral. An impressive undertaking, it could easily be the envy of many Caribbean academics who face linguistic challenges in their research on the region. One drawback of this encyclopedic approach, however, is that Maingot tends to reopen well-known polemics that have long been litigated, for example his treatment of the historical and political connections between Eric Williams and Juan Bosch, as well as his rereading of the debates between Williams and Frank Tannenbaum.

Maingot's main thesis is that the Caribbean has navigated a path between modernity and conservatism, the result of which is racial conflict, which does not lead to structural transformation, and a brake on radical Marxian tendencies. This interpretation of the region leads him to discount most radicals and radical moments in history as inconsequential or short-lived. It is partly this preoccupation that pushes him to question Gordon K. Lewis's Marxian bona fides. Indeed, Maingot describes Lewis as a "strategic conservative" and as having an "incurably romantic heart" (p. 72). Using a mechanical approach to structural change, he faults Lewis for arguing that for Puerto Rico to move to socialism, it must first make a fundamental break with U.S. imperialism. His argument represents some slippage into Marxian orthodoxy, in an attempt to demonstrate Lewis's failure to apply an authentic Marxian analysis to the Puerto Rican reality of his day.

Readers will at times be surprised by some of Maingot's musings. He notes, for example: "Haitians generally think metaphorically: fables of animal life, folkloric explanations of the mysteries of nature, all provide firm and clear lessons by which to act or guard against the evil eye or other such supernatural yet very human forces" (p. 111). Such a description is more suited to the exoticism of early Caribbean travel writers than to such a keen observer of the region. Similarly, one is struck by Maingot's claim that Barbados has no notable pidgin dialect, and no significant nonwestern religion or syncretic cults. Perhaps he has not been to Barbados in the last three decades, with its significant population of Spiritual Baptists, Rastafarians, Afro-centrists, and a thriving, distinct creole language.

Maingot has a broad sweep in his examination of Frantz Fanon on violence, Aimé Césaire on Négritude, and the collapse of the Grenada Revolution. This

is a huge intellectual arc to assess. “Clearly, neither Fanonian colonial violence and terror nor Césaire’s Négritude could explain the nature of Caribbean race relations” (p. 126). Most would agree that no one theoretical framework would explain the whole of the Caribbean area, but it is undeniable that the works of Fanon and Césaire have been enormously influential among critical thinkers of the region. If, for example, André Breton had not been as influential among Caribbean surrealists, it might be that surrealism in Martinique and Haiti would have had a different trajectory, more in tune with the region than with Europe. As Robin Kelley and Franklin Rosemont remarked (in *Black, Brown and Beige: Surrealist Writings From America and the Diaspora*, 2009), as *Tropiques*, the Martinican journal of culture, edited by Césaire, “became more surrealist, surrealism in effect became more black.”

Much of Maingot’s critique is leveled at the Grenada Revolution. This is an understandable target to justify his thesis that the Caribbean is generally averse to a radical tradition and more likely to follow practical ways of approaching modernity. Moreover, he sees the failure of the Revolution as proof of the decline of any Marxist or radical tradition. Throughout his insistence on the Soviet and Cuban militarization of Grenada, Maingot fails to mention that the only time the new Grenada airport was used for military purposes was during the U.S. invasion of the island. Lastly, Maingot fell easily into the illusion of Barbadian exceptionalism. While he was lauding its lack of corruption, *The Nation Newspaper* was editorializing: “Corruption is endemic in this country” (see “Nationnews,” June 15, 2016). Whereas Maingot proclaims that Barbados is relatively crime free, the country has been hit by a series of homicides, as well as by gang violence, drive-by killings, kidnappings, and drug trafficking. He sees proof of its exceptionalism in the island’s refusal to turn its back on its colonial past. In the end, however, he concedes that “Barbados is not alone in adhering to traditions that have worked well for them” (p. 303). His analysis of Barbados is both trite and superficial. The end of this book leaves one with an unresolved contradiction set up by Maingot himself. How can there be a decline in Caribbean Marxism and radical politics and race theory if these positions never really took root in the region in the first place?

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