Christopher Taylor, *Empire of Neglect: The West Indies in the Wake of British Liberalism*. Durham NC: Duke University Press, 2018. ix + 320 pp. (Paper US\$ 26.95)

It is commonplace to note that, after the end of slavery, Britain's Caribbean colonies lost their place as the most prized territories in the British Empire. As Britain's efforts turned toward India, Africa, and the settler dominions, the Caribbean territories languished. British commentators began to describe them as ruined, while Caribbean subjects, especially White and mixed-race commentators, complained about metropolitan neglect.

Empire of Neglect explores the ideological contours and rhetorical operation of this neglect. Across five chapters, Christopher Taylor argues that neglect was produced by the liberal political economy that came to dominate British politics during this period. As the field of political economy gained ascendancy, its arguments for free trade became in effect arguments against empire, or at least against empire as a political state that extended beyond the British Isles. White creole elites understood the threat of political economy, and many of their anti-abolitionist politics were at the same time concerns about the likely severing of the political bonds between empire and colony. Since in Taylor's telling it was liberal political economy that most threatened West Indian primacy within the British Empire, he identifies its apex, the 1846 Sugar Duties Act, rather than emancipation a decade earlier, as the moment of true crisis in the Caribbean. As liberalism reconfigured imperialism, empire was no longer a political relation and Britain's full embrace of free trade politics in the 1840s cut the Caribbean colonies loose, both economically and politically. As a result, mixed-race creole writers such as Michel Maxwell Philip and George Numa Des Sources reoriented themselves toward the Americas, namely Spanish America. Through skillful readings of relatively obscure texts, Taylor notes the utopian promise that some mixed-race thinkers identified in the Latin American republics. Ultimately, however, these West Indians turned back to Britain, especially as the United States began to pose more of a threat across the region.

Taylor has given long overdue attention to the way that neglect worked as a conceptual framework in the British Caribbean. His choice to analyze several types of texts together—novels, economic tracts, slave narratives, and bureaucratic documents—is a good one, although the apparent choice to leave out even cursory archival explorations in the Colonial Office files weakens his arguments about how bureaucracy itself facilitated neglect. The juxtaposition of Jamaica and Trinidad, islands with different imperial histories and orientations to the Americas, is also revelatory of the ways that so many Trinidadian writers imagined that South America offered more possibilities for freedom.

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Yet despite its valuable arguments, the book is curiously detached from the concerns and scholarly habits of Caribbeanist scholarship. Contrary to one of Taylor's assertions, scholars have certainly noted that the Caribbean was abandoned by the British, so much so that the scholarship of the mid-nineteenth-century British Empire has itself tended to ignore the Caribbean precisely because of that neglect. Throughout the book, Taylor refers to the people in these colonies almost exclusively as West Indians, noting that his subjects described themselves this way. This is undoubtedly true. However, the way he uses the term gives the impression that all colonial subjects are collectively the subjects of this study, when in practice the majority of the Black writers mentioned only appear in the epilogue. (The one notable exception is James Williams.) To be sure, the mixed-race thinkers Taylor includes are essential to any understanding of the postemancipation period, not least because emancipation dissolved the distinction between freedom and enslavement upon which their status had previously rested. However, he fails to make sufficiently clear, throughout, that the materials under scrutiny cannot shed much light on the concerns of the Black people in these colonies.

Taylor also has a tendency toward flippant subtitles. There are at least two plays on recent pop songs, while at least one subtitle is a film pun. These subtitles were jarring to me, and not only because my own ancestors were enslaved in Jamaica. The transition these societies made out of one of history's great atrocities and into a liberal empire was one in which Black subjects had little access to citizenship and indeed, as Taylor notes, care. This would seem to warrant more sober treatment. Nevertheless, this is an important study that, by treating neglect as a political concept deeply connected to British liberalism, has much to say about how *some* in the Caribbean responded to that new reality.

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