

**Tony Martin, Caribbean History: From Pre-colonial Origins to the Present, USA:
Pearson Education Inc., 2012, 366 pp**

Dr. Stephen Joseph

Assistant Professor of Education and History
Centre for Education Programmes
University of Trinidad and Tobago
Trinidad and Tobago

In his most recent publication, *Caribbean History: From Pre-colonial Origins to the Present* (2012), Tony Martin Emeritus Professor of Africana Studies at Wellesley College, Massachusetts, presents a survey of Caribbean history from the advent of the Europeans to World War II. While the author, in general follows the traditional chronological approach used by historians such as Gertrude Carmichael and Learie Luke,¹ he takes a more thematic approach to the analysis thus bringing new rich perspectives to old topics. Three major themes emerge in the text, namely, European colonization -subjugation, domination and exploitation of labour and resources; resistance; and resilience of Caribbean peoples.

The first theme introduces Spanish colonization in 1492 with the entry of Christopher Columbus, and the attendant introduction of enslavement of, first the native population, resulting in part to the almost total annihilation of these indigenous peoples of the Caribbean, and after their demise, blacks. In his discussion of black enslavement as the epitome of theme one -domination, subjugation, and exploitation, Martin draws on the narrative/testimony of the enslaved Mary Prince, an enslaved in the English territories of Bermuda, Turks Island and Antigua, which gives graphic accounts of inhumane and barbaric treatment of whites to the enslaved including sexual exploitation of enslaved women by the whites; a development which according to Martin began in Africa where women were violated by white men stationed in the coastal forts. Testimonies of other enslaved Africans such as Olaudah Equiano and Esteban Montejo² also provide vivid accounts that go a long way in deepening one's understanding of the tragedy of Caribbean enslavement. Equally interesting is the author's reference to Bob Marley's *Redemption Song* to highlight what he refers to as the general lawlessness and violence that the Europeans brought to the Caribbean.

It is well known that like the indigenes before them, enslaved blacks refused to accept their situation with resignation, and this has been the subject of many works including Richard Hart, Michael Craton and others. Martin in order to emphasize this feature of resistance (theme two) in Caribbean history devotes as many as three chapters on a discussion on resistance and marronage in all parts of the Caribbean throughout the period of enslavement. The Haitian Revolution (1789-1803) led by Toussaint L'Ouverture, according to Martin, was the crowning achievement of resistance. The success of this war for freedom introduced a rising African consciousness which was to take form in Pan-Africanism aimed at developing a worldwide community of African peoples whether in Africa or the Diaspora. This movement according to Martin, inspired C. L. R. James's 1936 novel, *Minty Alley*, Boscoe Holder's paintings; literary and cultural works of Beryl Mc Burnie, Olive Walke and Nicolás Guillén who all elevated African dance, folk song and Afro-Cuban music to some level of acceptability; and inspired Eric Williams to establish the Pan-African Association in the Caribbean.

The longest chapter in this work (Chapter 11: "Immigration in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries") discusses the question of immigration of people into the Caribbean during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Following similar Caribbean historians such as K.O. Laurence, Isaac Dookhan, Bridget Brereton, Walton Look Lai, and Verene Shepherd,³ Martin discusses the entry and contribution of Asian immigrants - Chinese, Indians, Javanese -, liberated Africans, Europeans - Portuguese -, Middle easterners - Jews, and Lebanese-Syrians, and African Americans from North America. Martin, however, unlike previous writers who begin their narrative on these new immigrants in the nineteenth century, argues that documentary evidence reveals that the first East Indian immigrant to show up in the Caribbean was not in the 1800s but rather on February 17, 1595, some 243 years earlier.

An interesting feature of Martin's work is his use of the Peters Projection map to show European countries in their true size and proportion in relation to the Caribbean. Many scholars including the author believe that the use of the traditional Mercator projection misrepresented the true size of Africa and the Caribbean and fostered European imperialist attitudes including an ethnic bias against countries of the Third World.⁴ For Martin, the selection of the Peters Projection map is really an issue of values clarification where he purposefully sets out to present the Caribbean not as an undeveloped region, but rather as a viable entity with tremendous potential for growth and development which the European colonizers ably capitalized on. In true nationalistic style, Martin ends his volume with highlights of various achievements made by the Caribbean people in the areas of education, sports, and economic advancement.

Martin's volume represents five years of writing and many more of careful research of relevant primary and secondary sources. Despite very minor typographical errors the work is undoubtedly an excellent account of Caribbean history. It is written in lucid and captivating style and most excellently argued - a standard we have come to expect from Martin.

Students pursuing undergraduate studies in Caribbean history, those preparing for the Caribbean Advanced Proficiency Examination (CAPE), and History teachers in the secondary school system, as well as the general reading public will definitely find this work most helpful.

Notes

Gertrude Carmichael, *The History of the West Indian Islands of Trinidad and Tobago 1498-1900*. (London: Alvin Redman, 1961).

Learie Luke, *Identity and Secession in the Caribbean: Tobago versus Trinidad, 1889-1980* (Kingston: University of the West Indies Press, 2007).

Olaudah Equiano, *The Interesting Narrative of the Life of Olaudah Equiano, or Gustavus Vassa, the African. Written by Himself. Vols I and II*. London: Author, 1789.

Esteban Montejo, *Autobiography of a Runaway Slave*, Ed. By Miguel Barnet. Willimantic, CT: Curbstone Press, 1994.

Bridget Brereton, *A History of Modern Trinidad 1783-1962* (Kingston, Jamaica: Heinemann Educational Books, 1985).

Isaac Dookhan, *A Post Emancipation History of the West Indies* (UK: Longman Group UK Ltd., 1975).

Keith O. Laurence, *Immigration into the West Indies in the 19th Century* (UK: Ginn and Company Ltd., 1982).

Verene Shepherd, *Transients to Settlers: The Experience of Indians in Jamaica, 1845-1950*. Leeds: Peepal Tree/University of Warwick, 1994.

Walton Look Lai, *The Chinese in the West Indies, 1806-1995: A Documentary History*, (Kingston: The Press University of the West Indies, 1998).

Peters Projection map was developed by Dr. Arno Peters, a historian and cartographer, who in 1973 announced his "new" map projection which he believed more accurately displayed the underdeveloped Third World countries. He argued that the popularly used Mercator projection had the tendency to increase the sizes of regions according to their distance from the equator so much so that Greenland is represented as much larger than Africa when in reality Africa is fourteen (14) times as large. Peters Projection map has generated passionate debates over the years with some scholars highlighting shortcomings in both map projections. In fact several Geographic organizations have asked for a ban on both projections in favour of a projection such as the Robinson.